# THE ISLANDS OF TIME

**The Sequel to JUNCTION by JACK DANN**

# fantastic Stories

September
1977
$1
U.K. 50P
ICD 08288

**THE WHISPERERS**
**by Richard A. Lupoff**
**FLEUVE RED**
**by Robert F. Young**
**INDIGESTION**
**by Barry N. Malzberg**

R.E. Haerle 127512F
USASA Scty. Det. Rgn. 1
Box 3353
Ft. Meade, Md. 20755

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# Can One Dollar Really Change Your Life?

## At last, the secret of the Morgana Candle revealed.

### Some People Have It All

Ever notice how some people seen to have their days filled with life's riches? They travel, have money, are healthy, own big homes, have good jobs, family happiness. Ever been surprised that these people often are no smarter, harder working or better educated than you?

### The Secret

The secret is something that we call "luck." The Indians call it "Karma," the tribes of South America call it "Ritpla." But what is this...and can it be changed?

### My Story

A few years ago my life was average... or a little worse. I had a low paying job, lots of bills, and frequent unexplained stomach pains. I spent a good deal of time wondering how I could really make my life work well. How I too could experience the joys of life. I tried study, magic amulets, changing jobs. But the more I "tried" the more things stayed the same.

### Then A Strange Happening

One bleak night I was walking in downtown New York. The snow was a foot deep and I was feeling depressed. I suddenly tripped, fell face down in the snow. The next thing I knew a slim old man was helping me up. The gentleness of his face overwhelmed me; yet the strength of his hand was fabulous.

### Very Strange

As I got up he greeted me by name. I asked how he knew my name, he only smiled. Then he handed me a brown paper bag. He said there is something inside for me. We walked together for a few blocks without saying anything. It all seemed strange to me. As we turned a corner suddenly my new "friend" wasn't there. I looked around. As mysteriously as he arrive he was gone.

### Then a Miracle

When I got home I opened the paper bag and I found a small candle with a note. The note advised me to burn the candle and repeat a two sentence prayer. At first I was going to throw it away. Somehow I was overcome with a strong desire to follow the instructions. I burnt the candle, repeated the prayer and promptly feel asleep. When I awoke I felt great...In fact better than I ever felt in my life.

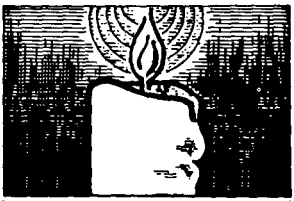
### Instant Success

My life, from that night on just seemed to get better and better. That day I got a huge raise, a total surprise. My health seemed perfect. I was in absolute tune with the Universe.

### One Lucky Thing After Another

Day after day things seemed to get better. Income tax refunds, family harmony, big job offers. It was like a dream.

### The strange true story of Jeffrey Prescott



**An invitation to Joy, Health and untold Wealth.**

### My Friend Reappears

About a month later I was sitting in a movie theatre enjoying my new found joy. Suddenly I turned to my right and he was there again. This time clutching a slightly larger bag. He told me a story so amazing I'm frightened to repeat it. As he softly smiled he talked in almost a whisper," Jeffrey, I want to share the secret of the Morgana Candle...and I want you to share it with the world." On a piece of yellowing paper was the place to buy candles. He said to say nothing when I went to buy candles and sell it to anyone that was sincere in improving there there life. He told me *Never* charge more than *A Dollar* for a candle and be sure to give each buyer the secret prayer. Then he smiled gently and added "Burn a Candle when you feel the need. For some a candle will last a lifetime for others one a month is perfect...they will know."

### My Sales Begin

We both sat quietly for the rest of the movie. I got up and left. The next day I went to the address on the slip of papers and got a supply of candles. Most of my friends scoffed but a few had seen my new life begin.

### One Startling Event After Another

The first buyer called me the next morning and told me of his cured arthritis. Here are some actual other stories over the last years

- **A school teacher finds money for a new house.**
- **A businessman's company increases 10 fold in one year.**
- **An elderly woman finds love the first time.**
- **A young housewife has new joy from her husband.**
- **A "C" student starts getting "A" grades.**
- **A senior citizen finds his debts disappear.**
- **A married couple find their marriage start to work.**

### For You

And now here's the opportunity for you to share in this blessed flame of happiness

### A Simple Offer

Send me two dollars and I'll send you two Morgana Candles...And the prayer.

### Absolute Guarantee

Burn one candle. If your life isn't noticeably better just return the other one. I'll refund the money you paid for *BOTH* candles even though you've returned only one. What could be fairer? Of course, no one can guarantee you love, health and wealth but you have nothing to lose!

### About Me

I don't know why I was chosen but let me tell you a few interesting facts. Since discovering the Morgana Candle my life is perfect. I have all the money I need. Money, love, good health seem strangely attracted to me. I want you to know I'd like to share it all with you, on a no risk offer. But if you don't want it it's really okay with me. I love everyone and I love you just as you are regardless of whether or not you'd like a Morgana Candle.

### Why It Works?

Many ask why the Morgana Candle works and who the old man was. Frankly I don't know. I only know that it works.

### Buy More Than Two

If you'd like more than two (For your own life or for gifts) the same guarantee applies. Burn the first one...if it doesn't work return the other candles for a full refund including the first.

### You Have Nothing To Lose

**Order today...a new world may be waiting for you.**

**JEFFREY PRESCOTT**
241 Drake Court, Dept.JP-46
Levittown, New York 11756

Yes. I want to try the Morgana Candle on your absolute money-back guarantee.

☐ Enclosed is $2.00 (Plus 50¢ postage and handling) Send two candles and the prayer.

☐ Enclosed is $5.00 (Plus $1.00 postage and handling) Send six candles and the prayer.

Please do Not order more than six candles.

Name_____

Address _____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

New York residents must add tax.

© 1976 Jeffrey Prescott

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# fantastic

Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

ALL STORIES NEW & COMPLETE

SEPTEMBER, 1977 Vol. 26, No. 3

THE ISLANDS OF TIME
**A Complete New Novel by JACK DANN** ... 6

*new novelet*
THE LADY OF FINNIGAN'S HEARTH
**by PARKE GODWIN** ..... 50

*new short stories*
THE WHISPERERS
**by RICHARD A. LUPOFF** ..... 30
FLEUVE RED
**by ROBERT F. YOUNG** ..... 42
WITH GOOD INTENTIONS
**by MICHAEL F.X. MILHAUS** ..... 72
INDIGESTION
**by BARRY N. MALZBERG** ..... 88
TOM O'BEDLAM'S NIGHT OUT
**by DARRELL SCHWEITZER** ..... 94

*new features*
EDITORIAL **by TED WHITE** ..... 4
ACCORDING TO YOU ..... 125

*Cover copyright © 1977 by* **STEVE FABIAN**

Illustrating **Islands of Time**

**SOL COHEN,** Publisher
**ARTHUR BERNHARD,** Associate Publisher
**TED WHITE,** Editor
**GRANT CARRINGTON,** Associate Editor, Emeritus
**TERRY HUGHES,** Assistant Editor
**J. EDWARDS,** Art Director
**PRINT ADVERTISING REP., INC.,** Advertising Manager

FANTASTIC, Vol. 26, No. 3, September 1977 is published quarterly by ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO. INC., 69-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Editorial Office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. $1.00 a copy. Subscription rates: One year (4 issues) United States and possessions: $4.00. Canada and Pan American Union countries and all other countries, $4.50. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. Copyright 1977 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved. Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care, however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# editorial

TED WHITE

SEASONAL NOTES: Although this issue is dated "September" and will be published in the late summer, it is April as I write this, and spring has just made a dramatic appearance after a long and arduous winter. (Technically speaking, "spring" came and went in about one week; it's been in the high 80s here for the past week.) It's always cheering to see the trees burst into leaf, and the harshness of bright sunlight through skeletal trees muted into dappled greens. It also means a lot of work—cleaning up the yard, getting in the garden, trimming ivy (the ivy was devastated by the unusually cold winter), changing storm windows to screens—but I find it hard to return indoors and harder yet to concentrate on matters not immediately concerned with the rebirth of life perennially associated with this season.

As it is a season of birth, it can also be a season of death. My father died this spring, at the age of 88, three years after the first of a continuing series of "mild" strokes, the last of which was too much for his failing health.

There is something both "natural" and unpleasant about the slow and lingering death of a person in his old age. Memories begin to slip away, the most recent going first. (Last year, at a time when he often did not recognize my mother, to whom he had been married for over forty years, my father could still identify himself and his father and what they were doing in an old photo taken when he was sixteen.) Toward the end there could have been precious little for him in the life to which he still clung: his passions had been music (classical) and reading, and he could no longer hear or see well enough for either. And there were the ironies: after many years of putting off the purchase of his first television set (in the late forties he was waiting for TV to be "perfected," in the early fifties for color, in the late fifties for color to be "perfected," and, later, for prices to come down—and this in a man whose interest in radio had dated from the pioneering days of that medium) he finally bought a Sony color set only a year before his first stroke and was unable to enjoy it long.

My father was fifty the year I was born, and my feelings about him as I grew up were mixed; I often complained that I had no "real father," but rather an extra grandfather. Yet, as I grew out of childhood I came to appreciate him better. His life spanned almost the whole of the "modern age" of technology: he watched the advent of the horseless carriage and its incredible impact upon our culture; he fought in the trenches in France in World War One and travelled extensively over the world in the years following; he was a sheepherder, a postmaster, a mer-

(cont. on page 101)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# READ IT SLOWLY.

ou'll want to. It's that good . . . it's The Hugo
/inners: 23 speculative fiction stories that have
on the science fiction equivalent of the Oscar
-Arthur C. Clarke's superb story, "The Star,"
ack Vance's classic, "The Dragon Masters,"
nd Poul Anderson's award-winner, "No Truce
/ith Kings," plus 20 more.

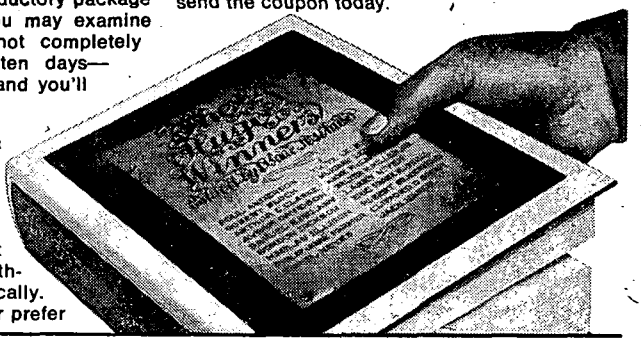
his fabulous 864-page anthology of speculative
ction sells for $15.45 in the original publisher's
dition. It's yours, if you wish, as one of 4 books
r just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling) when you
in The Science Fiction Book Club.

**Here's how the Club works:**

hen your application for membership is ac-
epted, you'll receive your introductory package
four books for just 10¢. You may examine
em in your home, and if not completely
atisfied, return them within ten days—
embership will be cancelled and you'll
ve nothing.

bout every 4 weeks (14 times a
ear), we'll send you the
lub's bulletin, *Things to
ome*, describing the 2 com-
g Selections and a variety of
ternate choices. If you want
th Selections, you need do noth-
g; they'll be shipped automatically.
you don't want a Selection, or prefer
an Alternate, or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided, and return it to us by the date specified. We try to allow you at least ten days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive an unwanted selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need take only 4 Selections or Alternates during the coming year. You may resign any time thereafter, or remain a member as long as you wish. At least one of the two Selections each month is only $1.98 plus shipping and handling. Other extra-value selections are slightly higher but always much less than Publishers' Editions. Send no money. But do send the coupon today.



82. **Mindbridge.** By
e Haldeman. Mind
panding space
avel by the author of
e Forever War, the
76 Nebula winner.
plicit scenes and
nguage may be
ensive to some.
b. ed. $8.95

21. **The Foundation
logy.** By Isaac
imov. The ends of
e galaxy revert to
rbarism. An SF
assic. Comb.
ice $19.85

73. **Children of Dune.**
Frank Herbert. Second
quel to the Hugo and
bula award-winning
ne, this is the final
lume of this out-
nding SF trilogy.
b. ed. $8.95

39. **Gateway.** By
derik Pohl. Travel
alien ships to
tant parts of the
iverse—with no
arantee of return.
the author of Man
s. Pub. ed. $8.95

6320. **A World Out Of
Time.** By Larry Niven.
A black hole in space
sends Jerome Corbell
3 million years into
Earth's future where
the ultimate battle of
the sexes is raging. By
co-author of The Mote
in God's Eye. Pub. ed.
$7.95

8532. **The Hugo
Winners, Vol. I & II.**
Giant 2-in-1 volume
of 23 award-
winning stories,
1955 to 1970.
Asimov introduces
each. Pub. ed. $15.45

4770. **Llana of the Gathol
and John Carter of Mars.**
By Edgar Rice Burroughs.
Excellent 2-in-1 volume
in the Burroughs Mars
series. Special Edition.

7328. **Shadrach in the
Furnace.** By Robert
Silverberg. In the year
2012 a vicious plague
is destroying the world
while its ruler Genghis
Mao jealously guards
the only known anti-
dote. Pub. ed. $8.95

1412. **Imperial Earth.**
By Arthur C. Clarke. A
representative to Earth,
from Titan, Duncan
MacKenzie plans to solve
an invention that threat-
ens his homeland's econ-
omy. By Hugo, Jupiter
and Nebula winning
author. Pub. ed. $7.95

9086. **The Infinite
Arena.** Terry Carr, ed.
Spaceships instead of
polo ponies and base-
ball played by aliens
are a few of the
events in these seven
SF sports stories.
Pub. ed. $6.95

6627. **Mirkheim.** By
Poul Anderson. An
exciting tale of intra-
galactic war and
political intrigue.
Pub. ed. $7.95

9043. **The Star Trek
Concordance.** By Bjo
Trimble. A must-have
large-format paper-
back with summaries
of every episode and
a complete lexicon of
Trekkish terms.
Pub. ed. $6.95

## ANY 4 SCIENCE FICTION BEST SELLERS FOR JUST 10¢ with membership

**Science Fiction Book Club** 45-S131
Dept. LR481, Garden City, N.Y. 11530

I have read your ad. Please accept me as a member in the Science Fiction Book Club.

Send me, as a beginning, the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, and bill me just 10¢ (plus shipping and handling). I agree to take 4 additional books during the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter. SFC books are selections for mature readers.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

Mr.
Mrs.
Miss _____
Please print

Address _____ Apt. ____

City _____ State _____ Zip ____

If under 18 parent must sign. Order not valid without signature.

Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save members even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Toronto. Offer slightly different in Canada.

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL
REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Jack Dann's "Junction," when published here as a novella, was a finalist for that year's Nebula Award (given by the Science Fiction Writers of America). In rewriting it for publication as a book, Jack found himself with a new and much longer ending which itself comprised a novella. It overlaps slightly with the original ending (as published here) in its opening pages but can otherwise be considered a sequel. Since it's been four years and newer readers may not be familiar with the original "Junction," Jack has supplied a Foreword in which he gives a synopsis of the earlier story, leading up to–*

# THE ISLANDS OF TIME

## JACK DANN

*Author's Foreword*

IN NOVEMBER 1973 a short version of my novel *Junction* was published in FANTASTIC. I felt that the ending of that version was inadequate, and when I reworked *Junction* into a novel a very different ending suggested itself. This new ending is contained in "The Islands of Time."

"The Islands of Time" is approximately the last third of the novel *Junction*. I think a few words are necessary to describe what has gone before:

The idea behind *Junction* is that cause and effect as we know them have been negated and the world has become indeterminate, except for a few pockets of causality where familiar natural laws still work. Junction, a town which has the religious ferver of the middle ages, the social organization of a medieval fief, and the vague memories of twentieth century America is inside one of these pockets. Surrounding Junction is unformed potential, the substratum of reality, what Junctionfolk think of as Hell.

In Junction, the townspeople react to the indeterminate reality all around them by trying to order as much of their world as they can. However, Ned Wheeler, the protagonist, rebels against the strict lifestyle imposed upon him by Junction and his father; he carrouses and lives in a whorehouse.

As the story opens, Ned is standing at the edge of town, looking into Hell. Something runs out of the chaos. Ned runs away in fear, then goes back to see if it is still there, and finds nothing. He goes back to town, but is made aware that, whatever it is, the 'monster of the imagination' he saw running out of the chaos wants him. Ned refuses to face it for a time; when he does, he learns that it is really a man who has come from the past to take him back to the past: to present-day New York. He is told that everyone there has been dreaming about him. The same dream. But, as yet, no one knows the end of the dream.

Ned soon finds out that he, and to a limited extent his guide, Kaar Deacon, can shape the stuff of reality. The techtonic forms of Hell grow

**ILLUSTRATED by STEVE FABIAN**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around them as they leave Junction, cutting them off. Ned thinks a way out of the chaos, and they crawl into a pitch-black tunnel, where Deacon explains as much as he knows to Ned. New York, like Junction, is isolated, trapped in dreams. But who is doing the dreaming?

Then Deacon disappears, leaving Ned alone in the tunnel.

The tunnel ends in a subway station in NYC, and Ned is recognized by a crowd, beaten, and finally rescued and taken to a hospital. He is in a New York City that is changing in small, grotesque ways. The 'indeterminate times,' short periods when reality slips, are occuring more frequently. The world is degrading back to former periods, and 'objects' are returning to former shapes. Astor Plaza 'degrades' back into the Astor Hotel. Ned cannot stand the indeterminate times, cannot stand those around him in the hospital, where he is being tested and observed. He claims he cannot dream in the hospital—and the doctors are interested in his dreams, for therein may be a clue as to why everyone in NYC is dreaming about him. He is removed to the Astor Hotel and is looked after by Weissman, a detective.

Then everyone dreams of Goreme, a desert region, which Ned has also dreamed about. A meeting is held in Ned's hotel room. There he meets Doctor Kheal, who worked with him at the hospital; Ingrid Oolan, a parapsychologist; Doctor Taharahnugi; and Deacon, the man who had guided him through Hell. They agree that everyone had the same dream—a directive to go to Goreme. It seems that there the dreams will end and questions will be answered.

They resolve to leave the next day; but Ingrid remains with Ned for a time. She claims she is just playing out the dream, that everything they do is fixed, that they are simply working through fixed dreams.

Ned leaves with Weissman the next day. They are taken to the Pam Am Building where a helicopter is waiting. But a crowd has formed; everyone in the crowd has been dreaming of Ned. They try to get to him, push through the police lines, and another indeterminate period begins. As if in a dream, Ned watches the crowd break the car windows and pull one of the detectives out of the car by his hair. Then Weissman is killed. Ned can only watch, it seems.

Then everything goes white, and Ned is getting out of the limousine. There are no crowds in the streets. Weissman is alive. It is as if Ned had just awakened from a dream, but the dream was real. Ned, as an observer, has affected the outcome of events around him; has, in effect, skipped to an equally real world where there are no crowds in the streets. There is an idea in quantum theory that *all* the possible outcomes of an experiment occur and that the consciousness of the observer somehow determines which of the possible outcomes will be observed; it is one of the possible solutions to Schrodinger's paradox of the cat that is at the same time dead and alive—statistically, of course.

"Islands of Time" opens on the roof of the Pan Am Building, just after Ned dreamed that the crowds broke through police lines and killed Weissman.

*1*

THE ELEVATOR DOORS opened and Ned found himself on the roof of the building. Standing on this concrete shelf, he could see the spires of the city. South-east was the Chrysler Building, the United Nations, the East Side Airlines Terminal; south-west was the Empire State Building, Pennsylvania Station, and in the hazy distance, looming large over the city like glass tombstones, were the World Trade Towers. The sky was grey, pol-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

luted by city fumes, as if a cement lid had been erected high over the city to keep out color and contain the smog. As Ned looked at the buildings around him, he could not help thinking that the city was deserted, that every last citizen except those huddling together on this roof had disappeared through the gates of another dream—a dream in which crowds were shouting for Ned's love and opportune death. The clarity and fullness of Ned's memory overshadowed the prosaic immediate reality of wind and sky and buildings. Ned had stopped worrying about sidestepping into a past he had not experienced; he wandered into possible pasts, presents, and futures for diversion or information. But he was still trapped; for although his prison seemed infinite, the very rooms he wished to enter were locked.

The helioport was smaller than he expected. It was merely a perch for a bird, he thought, staring at the Vertol Helicopter. His party had already boarded and were waiting for him.

"Come on, Ned," Weissman said.

"Another second," Ned said. He knew that the helicopter was turbine powered—whatever that was; he did not care to search his memory just now—a commercial version of the U.S. Army YHC-1. Although it was ungainly on the ground, (How could such a pregnant fuselage be supported by those frail rotor arms?) Ned thought it was beautiful. Its six tiny portholes were like coins made of glass. And the ship was white, the color of Heaven and virtue.

"There is no time," Weissman said, firmly taking Ned's arm and walking him to the copter. But would the air in Heaven hold them up? Ned asked himself, hoping that God would provide an answer. The grey sky, filled with pollutants, was surely heavy enough to hold them. But Heaven was clear as blown glass and evanescent as a snow-flake. (Ned had never seen a snow-flake.) But he didn't have to worry yet: he was still a safe distance from Heaven.

The pilot, dressed in a brown suit with an open shirt, hurried them into the copter. Ingrid waved as he entered, and he sat down beside her. Weissman took a seat beside Ladislas, opposite Ned. Ladislas looked nervous. Kheal and Taharahnugi were seated together. Deacon sat alone, three seats separating him from the others. Deacon smiled and nodded to Ned, then lowered his head as if to go back to sleep. Ned thought that Deacon had seemed most alive when he was in Junction.

"How are you, Ned? Aren't you a bit frightened?" Ingrid asked in a condescending tone. "I certainly am."

Although Ned was drag-tired and battle-shocked, he could feel a tiny coal of fear burning inside him. He nodded his head and touched her leg as a gesture of friendship; he was anxious to see her reaction since they had made love last night. He remembered that she had left his bed at dawn. He had tried to talk with her as he used to do with Sandra, but she ignored him, as if she had slept alone in her own bed and was just getting up, as she did every day, to make her morning ablution and go to work.

She crossed her legs and huddled close to the window. Ned rested his hand on her lap, deciding what to do next. Even this was contact with someone else, he thought. But her walls were up; Ned imagined that everyone was trapped inside battlements of fear, just as he was.

"I wanted to have a chance to talk with you," Ingrid said, moving


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slightly closer to him, glancing at his hand which was now resting between them like a pink bug. "I've been very interested in your dreams—the ones you didn't share with the rest of us."

"What makes you think I've had any such dreams?" Ned asked.

"I think you have."

"Why would you want to know?"

"Because I feel that they might be a key to this puzzle."

Ned searched into the future, enjoyed a lapse into the past—Ingrid looked beautiful, even fragile, when she made love: angry, breathing through clenched teeth, trying not to give herself, even when she climaxed—and said, "They're not important. They're only distortions of my fears and have nothing to do with this trip."

"Well, why don't you let me be the judge of that?"

Ned leaned toward her and whispered, "Why did you leave so early? I was awake, but you ignored me. Why?"

"What are you talking about?" Ingrid asked, stiffening, afraid, as if she knew what was to come next.

"You could have stayed longer, we could have talked, tried to prolong the closeness, maybe made love again . . ."

"I beg your pardon. I don't know what your insinuating, and I don't like the way you're talking to me, I'm not one of your Junction sluts. You've been dreaming too much."

Yes, I've been dreaming, Ned thought, and that coupling created a billion new worlds, countless pasts, presents, and futures. "You seemed to enjoy my dreams, and I didn't dream this," he said, touching her breast. He could feel the padding of her brassiere. "It's all been set up. We just follow along. Remember?"

She bit her lip and slapped him squarely on the mouth with her open hand. "You awkward, boorish, sonovabitch," she said, adjusting her bra and then kneading her bruised fingers which had turned red.

A 'Fasten Your Seatbelt, No Smoking' sign blinked on over the aisle and the pilot checked everyone to make sure the seatbelts were fastened tightly. As the pilot walked to the forward compartment, Ned noticed that he had a slight limp. He resembled one of the Fauboughers that had followed Simon into Hell.

Then the engines started. Ned listened to the rotors cutting the air with a whooshing sound, like a scythe cutting grass. Ned liked the rhythm and followed it as it gained momentum. As the helicopter lifted, Ned leaned his head back against the seat rest and closed his eyes. He let himself be sucked into the machinery of God, concentrated on the whirring of cogs and blades. But even with his eyes closed he could see Taharahnugi's smiling face and Kheal's close beside it. Ned dreaded a long dream-time, but it passed quickly and he awakened with a start.

"Sorry," he said to Ingrid after jarring her elbow. She nodded, gave him a wan smile, and returned her stare to the porthole.

They were flying over an urban area. Grey buildings jutted into a grey sky, reaching for, but never skewing, the wafer clouds that drifted by. The clouds insulated the city, but could provide little protection from the unformed potential that was engulfing previous reality.

In another future, Ned thought, New York would be only a part of the Bos-Wash Corridor, one of the pincers of urban drift. But that was not for this future. Soon, he expected to


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

see Tarrytown in the distance and the first mimicries of open country. But Ned distrusted the calm open sky, distrusted the security of fleecy clouds that looked like featherpillows. He dreamed that he was falling across the sky and pushing himself through feathery clouds. The sky was paradise; the clouds were God's thoughts. And Ned felt that something was awry.

He turned his gaze from the porthole and leaned toward the aisle, away from Ingrid's tightly laid out psychological space.

"Well, then what do you believe?" Kheal asked Taharahnugi. Ladislas leaned forward in his seat and looked very interested.

"I believe in 'Dreamin,'" said Taharahnugi. "That's the aborigines' word for the dream-time of the primordial when the Earth Mother Goddess and the Rainbow Serpent were born out of dream-stuff. After the Rainbow Serpent created The Road, the Earth Mother dreamed the world around it. Does that satisfy your need to know?" He smiled and stared at the ceiling.

Ladislas shook his head and muttered to himself, but Deacon only smiled and said, "That's very interesting. Perhaps the Rainbow Serpent symbolizes time and the Earth Mother Goddess space. Then your aborigines' dream-time might be similar to Jung's collective unconscious where past, present, and future exist at the same time as possibilities. We are not so removed, after all."

Taharahnugi chuckled and folded his large hands on his lap. "And to continue the analogy, we have been moving along The Road since the primordeal dream-time when events and processes occured in nonlinear fashion. But we're all moving at the same pace, so fathers will always remain older than their sons; and we all wear blinders, or did, so we see nothing but The Road. We're blind to the background of time and space. And, of course, we all walk backwards; that's why we remember the past and are dumb to the future."

"Perhaps we've left The Road," Kheal said.

"Of that I'm sure," replied Taharahnugi.

Although Taharahnugi had told the story as a joke, Ned was certain that he believed it. The substance of the analogy rang true, Ned thought, and he imagined that Taharahnugi drew his strength from a hidden past, a dream-time that boiled into the present. He was wary of this man who contained the Rainbow Serpent's dreams of time.

"Are you still interested in my private dreams?" Ned asked Ingrid who was still staring out the window, seemingly oblivious to the banter. Everyone was nervous, trying to fill the empty spaces with words, any words, just so the heavy silence of Heaven could be swept away. The sky seemed to be reaching into the copter, swallowing words and thoughts, a baby-blue manifestation of entropy—and Ned remembered the silence of Hell.

"Yes, I'm interested," Ingrid said, turning toward him with a smile, the professional woman in a blue-suede suit.

"All right," Ned said. "I had a dream that when I left the hotel the streets were mobbed. Police-lines couldn't contain the crowds. It seemed that the crowds had become one person with a thousand voices shouting for blood. I dreamed they stormed the car and killed Weissman. Then I remember being pulled out of the car." As Ned spoke, he could feel


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the closeness of that world, that dream. He filled in the details for Ingrid: screams, faces, bombs, smoke, his own thoughts, the girl beside him, Weissman with a pistol in his mouth, everything turning white, a slow fall into unconsciousness, finding himself on an empty street, the car behind him, policemen around him, Weissman stepping ahead.

"What do you make of your dream?" asked Ingrid.

"I don't think it was a dream; and if it was, then it was real, as real as what we're doing now."

"Why do you think it's real?"

Ned told her about the voice inside his head and his dreams of what it had said: "*All the possibilities exist, all the worlds are possible . . .*"

"And only you can remember those other 'possibilities,'" Ingrid said. She was mocking him, scolding him for dreaming as if he were a child. Ned felt a surge of anger, frustration, and revulsion; a sudden spout of anger, as if his glands had opened up inside him, washing his insides with venom. He was angry at himself for telling them anything, angry at Ingrid for her mocking face, angry at Deacon for playing bird-beast and tricking him into New York; but most of all he hated the demon presence that gave him unwanted sight and its thoughts coiled inside his head.

Weissman forced a smile and said, "So I died with a girl in my arms . . . Could be worse."

The heavy silence rolled back in and Ned found himself counting his breaths, then listening to the other's breathing, as if he could examine their character and tell their fortunes by the way they pulled and pushed at the air. Kheal and Taharahnugi watched Ned intently, as if they expected him to attack Ingrid, roll about on the floor, rush forward, kicking and screaming, to get at the pilot and crash the copter. Deacon seemed removed; he stared at Ned, but it was as if he was seeing into Heaven. But he affects nothing, Ned thought—or perhaps the effects of his dream have not yet been felt.

"You said something about a hole in the sky when we talked with you yesterday in your hotel room," Ladislas said. "Just what did you mean by that?"

"I meant just that," Ned said. "I was talking about intuition, and I said I *intuited* that there's a hole in Heaven." Ned felt his mouth move and he marveled at his words, his speech patterns, as if they were not his own; indeed, he felt they were not. He listened to the demon trapped inside his head, repeated its babble; he was trapped, as if in a dream, lost in non-linear spaces, hating his words and the ease with which he spoke. It had become too easy to slip out of the world, to drift through possibility on the hand of God, to pretend he had angel's vision and was different from Kheal and Ingrid who had only their own thoughts and memories.

He dreamed, and the copter and sky and clouds became no more than thoughts. Or perhaps he was caught in Deacon's dream.

". . . And all manner of demons and ghosts and strange things comes from the hole in the sky," Ned said. "It's like a black sun shining on the world, creating new thoughts and mixing up time and space. But it has no reason except God's."

"That's nonsense," said Taharahnugi.

"He's talking in riddles," Ladislas said, adjusting a black eye patch over his right eye which was almost closed,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"yet one would almost think that he was aware of the phenomenon of black holes. Except he'd have no way of knowing . . ."

"Intuition," said Kheal with an ironic look at Taharahnugi who ignored it.

"A black hole is a sun, isn't it?" asked Ingrid, her knee touching Ned's.

"Well, not exactly," said Ladislas, relaxing in his seat, as if just talking about black holes could shore up his anxiety. Ladislas was talking about what he knew, warming himself with familiar thoughts. "A black hole comes about when a massive star at least twice as large as our own sun collapses upon itself. As with any star, there comes a time when the forces of gravity overwhelm the internal nuclear pressures and the star collapses; but in a massive star the gravitional forces are so great that nothing can halt the collapse. The star's matter is compressed to a point of infinite density; the gravitational forces are so strong that not even light can escape. In that region of infinite compression, known as a singularity, geometry breaks down, as do the laws of physics and causality. Time can run backwards, anything goes."

"Do you interpret Ned as saying that a black hole is affecting us?" asked Kheal. "That it's changing the world?"

"Anything goes," said Taharahnugi. Deacon remained quiet.

"Until recently," continued Ladislas, "it had been assumed that a singularity had to be contained by its Event Horizon—a zone through which matter and energy could pass into, but never escape. However, theory now has it that in time a black hole will evaporate, exposing the singularity and its effects to the world beyond the Event Horizon. Some physicists have claimed that the singularity can not only pull in matter, but can also expell it. In fact, it could expell *anything*—and, as Ned would say, for no reason except God's. In theory, a black hole could emit doppelgangers of any of us, could turn our copter into a cloud, distort time, create Hell and angels and Junctions and all the sundry things that go bump in the night . . ."

"Such as Ladislas's alien," Kheal said.

"And so goes our cozy rational universe," Deacon said, looking around. "Prediction must fail in a universe that permits such holes to exist. So causality might simply be a local phenomenon, and temporary at that."

"But the fact is," Ladislas said, "that if any such thing existed, we would have detected it. I was only chasing fancies; there is no nearby black hole, no singularity, just our familiar heavens. And it is extremely unlikely that any of the known black holes could affect us."

Ned heard himself say: "You won't find a hole in the sky today. Look tomorrow. You've got everything backwards! It's the future affecting the past—the hole's in tomorrow."

He felt as if he had been pushing through scrims of gauze, through the heavy curtains of dream, only to find himself back in another present, another 'would-be.' His hand brushed against Ingrid's leg—as if that touch would be enough to hold him.

"LOOK OUT the porthole," Ingrid said. "Something looks wrong out there. How long have we been traveling, anyway? This trip should only take twenty minutes, more or less."

"Well, we haven't even been in the air five minutes," Deacon said.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What?" asked Ladislas. "We've been flying for at least a half-hour."

"No, we haven't," Ned said. "But we've been flying longer than five minutes."

"And so it starts," Taharahnugi said.

"Shut up," said Ladislas in a whisper.

There was not a cloud in the robin's egg sky. As Ned looked past Ingrid's hardened face (so unlike Sandra's) and out the porthole, he could not discern where land began and sky ended. It was as if the sky had swallowed the ground below. Now Ned realized what had been bothering him before: the skyscrapers and four-lane highways and rivers and hills and grasslands and suburban towns had not been believable. Their reality had been so diluted that they became illusions. But it was a gradual process.

No one could have survived in the towns they had left behind—they were just palimpsests to be erased. Real flesh would have whithered and the countryside could only become a painter's wash on a blank, white canvass. And now, Ned thought, everything was erased. Yet the world went on as usual, truckers drove goods in and out of the city, railroads functioned, planes flew, people ate, slept, dreamed, died, worked, and made love. But that was another world, one of tidy dreams and everyday get-up-in-the-morning realtime life. There freight trains rattled over track and trestle through upstate New York and Pennsylvania. Truckers drove their great rigs on imagined roads to imagined destinations. Perhaps they returned to different New York Cities, he thought. New York might be only a reflection of some kaleidoscopic beast that exists in all times at once, spread through the infinite shuffle of possibility.

All the dream worlds merging, Ned thought. Everyone trapped in dreams, all the dreams of the world roiling, providing reflected worlds for everyone . . .

". . . *if one mind is providing continuity* . . ."

Natural law had fallen apart behind and below him. Chaos was, for the time being, blue, baby-blue, the blue of dreams and crayons and picture books. But blue was as good a color for the stuff of the universe as any, Ned thought.

As the engines sputtered and rotors lost momentum, the plastic blue potential for a new cosmos congealed around the helicopter.

It slowed the blades to a halt.

The copter was stuck in the sky, like a fly in ice.

"What the hell is this?" Ladislas shouted, his sleepy eyes wide open, eyepatch in his hand.

"That's it," said Taharahnugi. "We're in the belly of The Mother. The snake will wrap itself around us until we can't see." He moaned, then began to scream.

"Quiet him down," said Deacon, but Taharahnugi shook his head at Weissman and ran to the forward compartment.

"Open the door," he shouted, banging it with his fists and trying to pull it open.

"Come on," Weissman whispered, restraining him gently.

"Well, something's wrong," said Ladislas. "Why doesn't the pilot answer? He can't just stay in there and do nothing. Perhaps he's hurt. The ship is dead, wrecked in the sky, why doesn't he come out of his cabin?" His voice rose in register.

"Because he probably doesn't want to be attacked by a lunatic," Deacon



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said.

"He can't just stay there and do nothing. I think we should find out what happened." And with that Ladislas got up and began pulling at the metal door. He kicked at the latch. "Well," he said to Weissman, "let go of Taharahnugi and help me."

As Weissman released Taharahnugi the latch gave way and Ladislas pulled the door open.

Taharahnugi shouted and tried to dive forward, but Weissman pinned his arms back. Ladislas held onto the door as if he was paralyzed.

There was no pilot nor forward compartment. Only blue sky pushing into the doorway. The sky seemed to be thick as glue, as light as spun candy. It would fill up every space like foam sprayed into a closet.

It began to roil into the passenger compartment.

Taharahnugi screamed again. Weissman pushed him into the aisle, pulled Ladislas out of the way, and then disappeared into the blue Hellstuff that was as thick as smoke pouring from a chimney.

There was not a sound. For an instant, Ned feared that either time had stopped or they were all dead.

But Weissman had pushed the door closed; the blue Hellstuff inside the cabin dissipated, and the world began. Ladislas ran down the aisle away from the door screaming, "Help, I'm falling." Taharahnugi lay unconscious against the raised seat platform, after running blindly into it head first. Kheal made sure that Taharahnugi was all right while Deacon tried to quiet Ladislas. Weissman stood in the aisle, as if waiting for something else to happen. Ingrid, who had for a few moments been transformed from an observer into a participant, returned to her former state and stared calmly out the porthole. There was, of course, nothing to see except blue, an expanse of blue that appeared hard and tangible as rock.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Kheal.

"I don't know," said Ingrid without turning from the window. As she spoke, the outside blue became mottled with grey; then the grey became dominant, soiling the sky, as if a washer-woman was wringing out dirty clothes into a basin of clear water. Ned could almost make out the slight definitions that could mean hills and rocks and artifacts.

"Look," Deacon said to Ladislas, who was beginning to lose control again. "Something's happening out there."

"I don't want to see it," Ladislas said.

"Are we making that happen?" Kheal asked, leaving Taharahnugi to sleep in the aisle.

"Ask Ned," Deacon said, but Ned felt the entire weight of the sky and his neighbors' thoughts, especially Taharahnugi's. After a long pause Deacon said, "Yes, I think we have something to do with the changes outside. That substance out there is the unformed potential, the substratum of reality, a quality that can be affected by mind. Soon it will set like plaster; this might just be another indeterminate period. But will we find ourselves in Goshen?"

"Who knows," Ladislas said. "Try intuition." He laughed in a high pitched voice, an operatic mockery.

"No," Taharahnugi whispered. "This isn't Goshen. This is The Road and that, that is the Earth Mother." He mumbled in his sleep.

The helicopter shuddered and a buzzing sound swept through the fuselage. The illusion of shaking was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only a manifestation and magnification of their fears. And without being told they all seemed to realize it. Then the copter seemed to settle, and a creaking sound such as one might hear on a ship worked its way fore and aft.

Ned knew that the copter was at rest forever. It was stretched across all the possibilities, between all the times. The weather outside is made of time and the ground is the solidified smoke of Hell, Ned thought, imagining shapes in his mind that took form in the greyness beyond the helicopter.

"Just another illusion," Taharahnugi mumbled and then chuckled. He was having a fitful sleep.

"Spatially, perhaps, we may be in the vicinity of Goshen, but that's quite meaningless now," Deacon said.

Growing impatient, Ned closed his eyes and dreamed. The desert spread out around him like a shadow, silently sucking the life out of the moist soil and warm creatures and replacing them with reddish-yellow sand and soft turf. The spires, overhangs, and cut cones of rock were overpowering in their monochromatic contrast of light and shadow. He was dreaming a country of flat plains of sand and salt, barren tablelands encircled by red mountains of porphyritic rock. Rough hewn cathedrals jutted into a pale, cloudless sky. A breeze pushed the sand into waves (or were these the swellings of rocks millions of years old?) and bit microscopic pieces out of stone which would soon become reddish-yellow sand again.

Although the sun was high in the sky, the colors of the land shifted as if gauzy veils were constantly obstructing clear sight. The dominant hue would change from red to yellow and then white. Shadows as dark as the eyes of demons seemed to change their shapes between rocks. This was another region of Hell, Ned thought. If the shifting Hell of Junction was made of diamond shapes, this Hell was of a softer nature. Every breath wore it away, revealed new shapes, new colors. But this was a muted world; only the shadows seemed tangible. The rockscape with its attendant shadows could almost be a city, he imagined, a city constructed over millenia by the touchings of sunlight and the gougings of wind.

And while Ned dreamed, the others watched the plastic coated walls of the helicopter melt into the sand and rock around them. Taharahnugi was still asleep and started to snore. He dreamed of verdant forest, of a thousand shades of green, of African lifeforms, of the music of the heart and ghost-dances; and the green world curled around him, swallowing Deacon, Ladislas, Weissman, Kheal, and Ingrid.

Only Ned was alone, trapped in his dream of sand and stone.

## 2

NED WAS LYING in the desert sand. The air was dry and irritated his throat and lungs, as if he was breathing the motes of yellow, brown, and red sand. Colors and shadows shifted around him as the midday sun was obscured and revealed by the slow moving continents of clouds. All around him was tableland, the redlands of Ürgüp, the whitelands of Nevsehir, and in the deep distance Ned could visualize the gouges and polished crags cut by the now-dead river Kizilirmak and its nameless tributaries. Ned was lying in a human-sized desert. All around him was dry, dead land, a land of skeleton shapes, a desert of sand, rock, and


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mirage.

But all this would change, Ned thought. The land would be frozen in winter, glazed over with blue ice, new shapes forming on the old. And snow would blot out the sun and sky, turn the world into a flat white surface. Later, Kizilirmak would come to life for the thaw, if only as a stream.

But time was grinding on so slowly, he thought. An eon might pass before a drop of rain fell, a millennium before the soft touch of snow.

Ned waited, trapped in this expanse of desolation. He was thirsty and hungry. Soon, he thought, he would be touched with fever. His crotch itched. A scorpion was making its way towards his extended arm, its feelers touching the ground, sensing and feeling movement that was miles away. Ned noticed that it was carrying five young scorpions on its back; they would soon be mature enough to drop from their mother's back and forage on their own. The scorpion would crawl a few inches, curl up and wiggle its pincers, clean them with its lobster legs.

Ned could hear the scorpion whispering to him,, but its comments were too simple to be understood. But as it came closer, the creature's thoughts became stronger and Ned compensated for its lack of intelligence.

"You would do better in the shade," it said. "there, in the temple where your arm points."

"Why can you talk?" asked Ned, looking ahead, past the scorpion, but seeing nothing but distant rockscape, the rubble and detritus of Hell. He sifted coarse sand through his fingers, then scooped out another handful.

"Because I am conscious, as is everything hereabouts. Listen to the sand you're sifting, and the rocks beyond. They all have a whisper. But you're supplying the words and conceptions. I'm just communicating a sensation, and a simple sensation at that."

Ned watched its slow, agonized movements towards his outstretched arm. He was wary of the euphoric feeling that was beginning to come over him. It dulled him, made him wish for Hilda and Sandra and, perhaps, Ingrid and great chunks of green tinged glass.

Something green sparkled in the distance, perhaps a mirage or sunlight caught in the recesses of rock.

"Of course," the creature said, "if you don't move I will poison you."

The scorpion was only a few inches away from Ned's fingers. Ned curled them into a fist, hoping to gain time. He was sluggish and could feel the energy being sucked out of him. It was as if the land was draining him of breath and fluid. Ned watched one of the young scorpions drop from its mother's back and wriggle in the sand like a spider crusted with dirt.

And Ned thought he could hear himself snore.

He sensed an infinity of sand, porous rock, crags, and mountain folds around him. Everything whispered. His quickened breath was the chatter of washerwomen; the wind was old men and children talking. The rocks conversed with sand, and sand with sun. The sky was a blue ceramic bowl with clouds pasted inside for effect. Slowly it was flattening out, soon to crush him into glass.

The sky hummed, but Ned did not listen to what it was saying; there was no time: the vainglorious scorpion was hoping to deliver death, or at least a respectable sickness. With a supreme effort of will, Ned pulled his arm to his chest and stood up. He was dizzy,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as if his head was filled with water sloshing from side to side.

His thoughts were jumbled into desert sounds. He listened to the whispering, whistling, and humming. He listened to the broken syllables and almost words. The scorpion inched past Ned's foot, but Ned was too far above to understand its simple cursing.

I don't see a temple, Ned thought, secretly addressing the scorpion, which was burrowing its way into the sand.

"Go straight ahead, in the direction of your face," said a voice inside Ned's head. The voice was familiar. It was Deacon and the birdbeast and Weissman and Ned's father; it was the thrumming of thought, all the street-sounds and bar noises, all the whispers of imagination and memory.

"What about the others?" Ned looked around, but could not see a trace of the helicopter. Perhaps it *is* in the sky, he thought. He wondered if Taharahnugi was still unconscious. Were the others looking for Ned or were they lost in Taharahnugi's dream?

And Ned caught a glimpse of green forest on the western horizon where two dreams seemed to meet. He thought he could hear drums and chanting. Where are the others? he asked himself, not content with dreams and visions. He stood motionless, waiting for a reply.

"Forget about the others," the voice said. "You'll know what they're doing."

Was this a directive from an outside source? Ned asked himself. Or was it his own intuition? He could not sidestep, think laterally, and enter Taharahnugi's verdant dreams; the others were lost to him. Ned was alone in this conscious, mocking universe of hills and rock and shadow and sand.

Unable to find the scorpion, Ned walked on. The sand sucked on his feet, trying to bury them. Each step was an attack on the sand and a retreat from its grasp. He imagined that he was walking on the back of some huge fleshy beast, but the beast was asleep in slow-time and had not as yet taken a breath.

As he quickened his pace, the desert noises became louder. The sky hummed, the sand whispered, occasionally finding its voice and drawling out a few syllables; and the air gave him enough space to walk in. Soon the smooth waves of sand would give way to rougher ground. In the distance he could see a stone crown of spires and cliffs.

"It's both," said the voice inside Ned's head.

"What?" asked Ned.

"This voice inside your head constitutes both your own intuition and an outside intelligence. One nudges the other. You know: feedback. A cozy synthesis."

"What are you?" asked Ned, once more feeling his energy being sucked away. He imagined that he was falling to his knees in the hot umber-colored sand.

"I'm more than the scorpion and the sand sucking on your feet. But I'm just a part of the whole thing."

"Shit," said Ned.

"Now you sound like Taharahnugi." The sand and rockthrusts whispered "haha," each tiny bit adding its own measure of mirth, as the wind ran its fingers toward the east.

"How do you know about Taharahnugi?"

"The same way you do," said the voice. "I know everything that you know, or could know if you knew how


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to see. And I know what you're in the process of learning."

"And what's that?" asked Ned. Mirages danced ahead with dust-devils. He focused his eyes on the rock formations ahead, the grotesque stone monsters shaped by volcanoes and beaten for centuries by feathers of wind.

"That everything here is conscious: the sand, rock, scrub, and crawling creatures, even the air. In this pocket universe every particle of dust and mote of sand is in perfect empathy with everything else. The sand under your feet feels joy when a spider is hatched; and the spider sees, senses, and suffers when a bird falls from the sky. They suffer for you and the wormwood you kick out of your way. We are the unformed potential you first talked about with Deacon, who, incidentally, is dead now. Died of lymphosarcoma.

"But we are all the bits of an ordering principle or mind, if you like, that has created itself out of its own potential. Everything around you is made up of the stuff of mind. We think around you, and with you. We are simply taking the natural direction of matter, for entropy is only an aberration, albeit a widespread one. But soon the entire cosmos will become conscious . . . "

Ned found himself stepping over rocks, trying to keep his balance and find footholds on the rocky ground. Stone shards stuck out of the cracked earth like rough shaped knives; it was as if the world was warning him to be careful.

The voice had become a buzz and would not answer his questions. Making his way through increasingly rougher Turkish hinterland, Ned could make out the crown cliffs ahead. Before them were miles and miles of deadland, plains that stretched from east to west like asphalt. It was a demon's dream, Ned thought, remembering highways that seemed to run ahead of cars like flat snakes. But the cliffs jutted into the pale, now cloudless sky to form that white crown. Natural shapes for Hod's church, Ned thought. An object lesson in perfection. God's wall.

As Ned gained the top of a ridge, he saw a field of rock cones that seemed to continue forever. The mass of even shapes overwhelmed the distant mountains which might be only larger cones, fields upon fields to cover the world, a cosmos of grey stars in a stone heaven.

"These cones are called *peri bacalari*, or fairy chimneys," the voice said, leading him into deeper levels of sleep. "The peasants in the region of Urgap believed that a thousand spirits dwelled in the conefields. According to one legend, the spirits often fall in love with young men passing through; and that is supposed to account for those unfortunate travelers who never reach their destination. There are many myths, of course. One claims that the cones are the tents of a vast ghost-army waiting to take their vengeance when the horns of God break the world into pieces."

The cones did look like tents, Ned thought. Each one cast an inky shadow on the parched ground.

"The grotesque shapes are the stuff of myths and dreams; many men imagined that they saw the dominions of the afterlife in those rocks. And the rocks were given names: there are *Uchisar*, *Ortahisar*, and *Kiliclar*, the towers of the spirits."

"Where are the peasants now?" Ned asked.

"They're all dead, but their souls make up part of the world. The uni-


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

verse conserves its souls, just as it does mechanical energy. Look around you. Conscious souls are rising from the earth. They're growing lighter and stretching into the sky."

Ned stared intently at the cones. They were so close together that they looked like the spines of a gigantic petrified beast. Most of the cones were small, but some were almost one hundred feet high. In the distance, the cones seemed to be more widely spaced; there were even a few isolated cones that cast long shadow-tails. Some of the cones were topped with bricks of basalt; others had been tortured by the elements for so long that only a stone pole remained with its cap of basalt.

"I see only cones and shadows," Ned said as he watched the ghosts cavorting from cone to cone before they rose into the blue sky and disappeared into Heaven. The ghosts were moving constantly, floating, flowing like water or curling smoke. Some were transparent specters; others were full-bodied, complete with hair, wrinkles, warts, pimples, and rouged cheeks.

"The transparent ones will rise first," the voice said. "See?"

"But the others look human," Ned said, his eyes moving back and forth to follow the dream.

"Yes, of course," said the voice. "The monsters are still inside the cones, soon to be spewed out and merged with the rest. They are the local gods, still hoping to be resurrected and worshipped by surviving natives. But they confuse ghosts with flesh. So they've been dying for quite a while."

The voice guided Ned across the conefields, past the natural rows of obelisks that seemed to be whispering to him, over ghost-laden rocks and through grey scrub. This country of ghosts and spirits was desolation itself. It was as if Goreme had been on fire, and only char remained; it was an umber and ashen world. Ned imagined that if he touched the cones, they would crumble into dusty clouds.

But where are Ingrid, Weissman, and the others? he asked himself. Can they still be caught in Taharahnugi's dream, could it be that strong?

Ned moved on. Guided by his sleepwalker's intuition, he investigated his dream images. He watched the ghosts rising into Heaven, passing through fluffs of cloud, each spirit adding its precious load of consciousness to the universe; and he waited for the gods resting inside the earth.

Ghosts with long noses and thin lips reached out to him. Lovely spirits spoke softly inside his head, invaded his private thoughts, rested in his memories. Transparent specters drifted around him like smoke carried on the wind, passed through his skin on their way to Heaven.

"They are pure life energy," the voice said. "Each one is forever stamped into reality."

"But you're losing them," Ned said. "They're floating away."

And a chorus of voices shouted inside Ned's head. Each voice was that of a ghost. They laughed and giggled, held conversation, and filled Ned with new languages and thoughts, new songs and sensations. They proved their reality by inhabiting him.

Ned listened for the voice that had guided him here, but it was silent.

"You don't need that voice anymore," said a ghost that was losing his hair.

"We'll show you around now," said a specter that could barely be seen.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He spoke in Kazan Tatar, a Turkish dialect, which Ned could now understand.

"We're not lost," said a ghost that had once been a peasant girl. Her face was smooth except for brown sacs of skin that hung under her deep set black eyes. She had been dead for a long time, for she spoke Old Turkish.

"We're just passing away," said another ghost that seemed to be growing out of the peasant girl's stomach. "Just as water turns into steam, so are we passing into another state. But as we pass into each new state, we become more complex and fewer in number."

"You see," said the specter that spoke Kazan Tartar, "by losing ourselves, we're becoming more conscious."

"And he's well on the way," said the ghost that was losing his hair. "I can hardly see him. But what about you?"

"We can certainly see you," said the peasant girl. The ghost growing out of her stomach was giggling.

"You're better off than the monsters below you," said the ghost, trying to extricate himself from the peasant girl. "But Ned, Ned, you're not dead."

The chorus took it up. "Ned, Ned, you're not dead."

Ned began to climb out of the upper dungeons of sleep.

"Do you know where you're going, Ned?" they asked. "You're passing away, too. Running just ahead of the monsters trying to break out of the ground. But your skin's too tight. Loosen it, Ned. Die a little. Be dead."

Ned broke into consciousness with a howl. The ghosts ignored him and went about their business of ascending into Heaven. Ned pressed his hands against his face and listened to his fingers break. He felt for his flesh, which would soon dissolve, layer by layer.

3

THE CONE FIELD with its thousands of fingers protruding from the ground was behind Ned. Ahead was rocky ground, smooth sandy ridges, grotesquely shaped rocks, salt deposits, and a broken wall of sheer mountain cliffs. Everything was quiet except for the wind which screamed as it pushed itself into the crown of cliffs ahead. Shadows defined the landscape, transformed isolated rocks into demon faces.

Working his way up another hill, Ned listened for voices, but could only hear the crack of his eardrums as the air pressure changed. He rested beside a ragged copse of wormwood and wild lavender scrub. But as sleep began to descend upon him, voices called from the mountains, whispered in the sand, bumbled in the breeze that chilled his perspiring face.

Ned started walking, concentrating on the whispers and the mountain in the distance. Ghosts seemed to flit from stone to stone. Shadows moved, as if massing to capture him. And all the mirages of Goreme were on display as faraway dust devils swept sand and debris hundreds of feet into the dry air.

As he neared the minarets and jagged cliffs of stone, Ned could distinguish the hermitages, monastic complexes, and churches from the natural lines of rock. To his left, thirty feet up a smooth rock face, was a small opening. But the pulley ropes were rotted, and the monksbasket had long since been swallowed by the sand. That church must have had


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other sources of light, Ned thought, scanning the rock for other openings.

He felt himself being drawn toward a stone fist that stood sixty feet high. A foot wide staircase hewn out of the rock led into a large opening.

Ned looked up at the church which seemed to cut into the azure sky. Everything was quiet hereabouts; no dustdevils played through the stone courtyards and empty churches. Clouds drifted past, and for a vertiginous instant Ned imagined that the rocks and cliffs were moving at a stately pace. He stepped up the stone stairs and paused in the narthex entrance. Desert light streamed through the opening and illuminated the church. Ned recognized the fresco secco portrait of the Emperor Genetos to his left: it was just as he had dreamed it.

It has probably taken a lone carver-architect about two months to chisel out this three thousand foot room, Ned thought as he looked into the church. but the structure had always been there, even before the carver began, somehow implied in the soft tuff. The carver was only God's tool used to coax and torture the rock into a work of art.

The plan of the church was a cross inside a square; the principal dome was situated over the crossing and the four subsidiary domes over the corners. But the structural rendering was idiosyncratic, almost pagan in its rawness and disregard for neat geometry and detail. Since the carver-architect did not have to worry about structural safety, he could create as he pleased, bring to life the impossible structures found in dreams. The cracked, tilted ceilings seemed as if they would cave in; their cupolas were stone bubbles about to burst and bury Ned in God's ruins. Painted arches didn't quite match each other, and the walls, too, were uneven. Ned had the impression of a maze, as if corners might be corridors leading to other secret rooms, ending in the sacred tabernackle of Hell. It seemed that the church would crumble with a breath; yet it could probably stand the millennia.

Intrigued by the paintings and designs that covered walls and ceilings, Ned walked into the church. Crude patterns of zigzags, half-circles, maltese crosses, eagles, bats, lozenges outlined the room. Crosses predominated—symbolic proof that the church had been properly consecrated. But the designs were only filler between paintings.

The Pantocrantor, represented by Christ, was the largest and most detailed painting in the church. It dominated the central dome which was surrounded by the celestial hierarchy. The architect-artist had envisioned Heaven as a very busy place: the four evangelists were crudely painted in the pendentives. The eastern apse contained the Virgin Mary, her yellow ocher halo only slightly smaller than Christ's. Arches and vaults were filled with saints and holy scenes. Lesser saints, martyrs, church dignitaries, events of the earth and the flesh were left to the lower portions of the walls. And for the faithful, now dead, the Last Judgment was painted in dramatic detail on the back wall. However, most of the paintings and designs were faded or marred by fissures in the stone.

"So it all comes back to this," said a voice inside Ned's head. "Look for me. I'm here."

Ned scanned the walls and ceiling. All the painted figures seemed to be connected by floral designs and curlicues. The artist had used a palette of


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only two colors: red and yellow, with red predominating. He used smears of charcoal black to outline and accentuate important aspects of the painted pantheon. Shell white highlighted haloes and intricate designs. If Ned did not know this was a churchroom, he would have thought it was a pagan place, painted red to represent the fires of Hell.

"The arch. Right above you."

And Ned found a faded fresco of a middle-aged man dressed in a red suit and yellow tie, holding a crumpled fedora in his hand. His face was strong, only softened by a curly red beard (the curls were stylized) and a yellow halo outlined in red, black, and white. He talked, but his lips were not synchronized with the words inside Ned's head.

"I'll speak to you this time," he said, his lips forming a stylized smile. A piece of his face fell off as he talked.

"Were there other times?" Ned asked.

"Yes. Many other times. They're all passing by right now."

"Who are you?"

"Right now I'm a plaster metaphor for Ahasuerus the Jew, who shouldn't even be here. But I think it's a nice touch. You could also visualize me like this, if it suits you . . . "

Ned felt himself turning over in his sleep. He looked around the room, at the figures and designs that seemed to be held in fire, and discovered that the church was held together by the things growing inside. Walls and ceiling and floor were illusions, appearances held together by a more underlying form. Dieties and saints smiled at him, the very personifications of substance. But Ned felt something was wrong with them. Perhaps their smiles revealed too many teeth.

And a smooth, thin tentacle curled around his leg.

Ned jerked away, repelled by its soft touch. Another tentacle wrapped itself around his neck. Screaming, he pulled the tentacle loose and tried to escape from the church; but other tentacles curled around his arms, legs, and chest.

"Let me go," Ned shouted, straining as if against ropes. "Let me go!"

"Don't be afraid," said Ahasuerus. "That's only to secure you for a moment."

"Moment?" Ned whispered, imagining it was a shriek.

"As long as you like. Now follow the other tentacles outside. You can see them probing, growing, closing synapses."

Ned was shaking with fear and could not catch his breath. He felt as if the church was filled with tentacles. He opened his mouth to shout, but his screams were dreams or whispers, and very far away. He felt as if he were dreaming two dreams at once. In one dream he shouted and railed at the universe; in the other dream he was mute, or perhaps awake.

"We're taking over your psychological space," Ahasuerus said. "We now inhabit the whole continuum of psychological space. Each tentacle, as you perceive it, reaches into another reality, another dream state. All the dreams are connected. Waking and dreaming become the same."

Ned tried to pull away from his living pinions; he tried to scream, but only whispered. "Let me go!" He imagined that his shouts were tiny animals that had scurried into a dark place in his mind where he could not find them. He tried to dream himself away from the church, but he was


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

trapped. He started to gag, but his tongue was between his teeth.

"Don't worry, we're holding you tight. You've just sunk inside reality. It's much thicker than the diluted stuff you're used to."

"I'm drowning," Ned said, spitting up phlegm, clenching his fists, trying to pull away from the tentacles.

"No, you're not," said Ahasuerus. "You're dreaming for yourself and everyone else. Dreams add another layer of reality to the world, an ever-thickening atmosphere of consciousness. And every soul contributes an idea, a thought, or simply the density of its being."

Ned strained against his bonds as if they were the earth itself. He thrashed about, pulled loose from the sticky tentacles, and was caught again.

"But why am *I* here?" Ned asked when he found he could not move a muscle. He was bound in ooze; the mass of tentacles no longer had recognizable form.

Ahasuerus laughed and was joined by the four evangelists. The Virgin waved from the eastern apse to the Christ in the central dome. The martyrs, church dignitaries, emperors, and holy saints were chattering amongst themselves.

"Because everyone dreams your dreams," Ahasuerus said.

"Do you dream my dreams?" asked Ned.

"Not only do we dream your dreams, we dream you. It's a lovely paradox: You're a figment of our mind, yet you came into existence first. Perhaps *you're* the diety."

I'm not a figment of your mind, Ned thought; the words seemed to tear his throat, yet there was no sound, only the silent turning of thought.

And then more laughter.

"Where are the others?" asked Ned. "Where are Taharahnugi and Ingrid and Kheal and Deacon and Ladislas?"

"Your friends are dreaming you as you dream them—that's how you imagine that what you perceive is reality and not a dream. New York and Junction and Goreme are only extensions of you. And you're only an extension of them."

"Then everything is just a dream," Ned mumbled to himself, wishing he could wake up in a familiar room.

"Dreams are made of thoughts," Ahasuerus said, "and the world is more like a thought than you'd imagine. Our thoughts, emotions, and ideas are like dust motes in a clear light—reflecting, tumbling, constantly creating new patterns. Our thoughts are converging to create a new atmosphere. Imagine one thought filling the universe. Becoming the universe."

"Who are you?" Ned asked, trying to work himself out of this dream. He imagined that the minions of humanity were choking him, crowding him, killing him.

"Just an instigator. Pushing matter into its natural direction. The alchemy of evolution turns things into thoughts. So I trace out patterns and match your dreams with those of everyone else. (Ladislas was right about that.)"

"I don't want you to select reality for me. I want to do that for myself."

"I was selected by your culture, *your* reality, just as you were. Now you face unity. The only thing of value you have to bequeath to the world is your consciousness; only consciousness will survive matter and time. It is not enough to create great works and have ideas. You must give up your very self."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ned mumbled "No" and dreamed of Hilda and Sandra and Ingrid, their puckered faces and loose skin, their high-pitched voices and clawing nails, their thoughts and intelligence. Each soul locked in flesh. Soft parts to push against. Single entities. Fitted tools. Ned was lost, lost again in a dream, a single dream amidst billions. He tried to shake his head, as if that might clear it. But he could not move.

"I'm thirsty," Ned said, his swollen tongue scratching against the roof of his mouth. He opened his mouth to breathe and a tentacle slid down his throat to suck his insides away. It became part of his throat, cool and wet.

"You are a mirror of the universe," Ahasuerus said, "or, if you prefer, a lense to focus its thought. Every soul in the universe mirrors all the others yet is unique. And as every soul merges with every other soul, we evolve into our destiny of total consciousness."

Ned gagged and imagined that he was looking at himself, that he knew every word Ahasuerus would say, as if he was lifting them out of that imperceptable instant before they were spoken. He dreamed that time was still spinning, rolling like rivers, tumbling like stones, moving forward and backward like great machines digging into the earth. For all its irregularities, Ned thought, time was still circular, a great disk with many veins. And he was caught in its center.

". . . And it is only natural that some greater soul should evolve out of this new collective consciousness," Ahasuerus continued. "Such a soul of souls could encompass the entire world of awareness, perceive the structures and patterns reflected by every soul."

"And you're this soul of souls," Ned said, spitting the words, trying once again to break free of the tentacles which had become part of him like layers of coral on a living reef. His spark of life was being merged with others.

"Just as matter evolves into mind, so do souls converge into diety," Ahasuerus said, folding his hands and assuming the posture of a deity. "A being composed of its myriads of souls can more perfectly reflect and comprehend the universe.

"Granted, the universe cheated a bit by going indeterminate here. But impatience is universal. It's only chance, of course. What difference is a few billion years?"

Ned began to sense everyone's dreams. He imagined billions of souls, each a dream inside the soul of souls. He felt the weight of their thoughts, a world crushing him. All of humanity had been impossibly stuffed into this place.

He howled, railed, ranted, and dreamed.

Perhaps the soul of souls is just another dream. He imagined it as a huge beast that was asleep and dreaming his dreams. A dream dreaming . . .

He felt as if he was sinking through the surface of things, seeing ideas and patterns instead of arches and cupolas, walls and ceilings. He traced the patterns ever downward into himself. As he followed the paths winding under his consciousness, he imagined that reality was a roof upon which the whole world of his senses had been piled. It resembled a great sparkling city; and he was a pallid animal scurrying in the sewers beneath—running, chasing down food, following living instinct. But instinct was the stuff of this world, the dark substance



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of these corridors of thought.

He was in Hell. All the paths led here. He felt that the universe was sliding down, burying him in the workings of its grand consciousness; and above him was that reef, glowing bits of consciousness fusing into the soul of souls.

The church was filled with the smoke of dreams, and every dreamer asserted his own presence. Ned recognized ghosts with long noses and thin lips, doctors and nurses, Baldanger, the Reverends MacDonald, Briar, Shorter, and Blues, the featherwaker, the girl who died in the car with Weissman, Miss Jenkens, and then he began to recognize the souls of people he had never known, could have never known, persons from the once dead past, the evolving future, and the pasts, presents, and futures of a thousand alternate worlds, all smoke layering the world, flushing into the universe.

Ned dreamed into the cosmos and drew out its patterns.

He dropped into the dark water of his soul where his instincts swam like great prehistoric fish in a realm that had not yet been differentiated into psyche or cosmos.

He passed through the layers of reality as if through the thermoclines of a lake.

His psyche was a beacon reflecting everything around him.

He was a small chip that contained and reflected the world.

Ahasuerus was right, he thought.

And he screamed as the scavengers carefully picked him apart to taste his experiences. He tried to conceal his dreams from them, tried not to remember the taste of Hilda, the whispering voice of Sandra, the gaunt face of his father. But they were now universal experience.

"I'm still here," Ahasuerus said, as the stone crumbled, leaving only his face and fedora. His mouth and nose were rapidly disappearing. His eyes were cracks in the soft tuff. "We'll disappear together."

Ned was still held by the living reefs which filled the church. "I need more space. Too much weight. They're pushing inside me." A ghost passed out of Ned's mouth and hovered above him, pinching its nose. Other ghosts appeared, smiling and scowling and scoffing at him like children. Ghosts danced on the edge of eyesight, then disappeared when looked at straight-on. Some ghosts were souls without substance, others wore flesh like old men. They were melting together, passing through each other, anchoring themselves to the walls and reefs and floor.

"Well, let them in," said Ahasuerus. "Give yourself up. The universe has taken your form."

"No," he shouted. "They're taking off my arms." As Ned screamed, he remembered something from the Book, a drawing of Satan trapped in Hell—antlers crowned Satan's head, his legs were spread and shackled, and a dead man's head protruded from his groin. Ned imagined that he was similarly trapped in a false heaven, caught in an iceflow of selves.

"Let them in," said Ahasuerus.

"No."

Another scream as they tried to pull Ned out of his flesh.

"Let them in!"

"No," Ned shouted, and he discovered that he could move his toes, then his arm. The world was tipping again, going indeterminate. He felt time flowing around him like chill breezes. Objects blurred, yet Ned could discern their previous, ancient forms. He imagined the church as



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seen from God's eye—natural veins of stone, the design inhering in the tuff itself.

The arch crumbled. Ahasuerus became soft stone crumbling on the floor, dust filling the room.

Ned pulled himself out of the thick atmosphere of souls that filled the church.

He squeezed out of the church. Light exuded through his pores, followed by sweat and grime. He could hear Ahasuerus chuckle inside his head.

"I hope that's just an affectation," Ahasuerus said. "But the voice was lost amidst Ned's thoughts, a grand confusion of thought.

Overcome with relief and euphoria, Ned looked around and saw that this country had been touched by Taharahnugi's dreams. There was something ominous about this verdant place. It was a luxuriant overlay of climbers, fronds, high canopied forests, flowering plants—a concentration of African fauna and flora. Jackanapes screamed, plumed birds screaked, and hidden insects chirruped. Before him was openland, meadows and rills covered with dark flowers and flanked by evergreen forests. In the summer light the shadows appeared as purple pools. But beneath all the verdant growth was Goreme with its sharp lines and stone faces. Ned recognized this land, even in disguise.

"Are the others in this place, too?" Ned asked.

"Yes," said Ahasuerus. "Everyone is locked in your head and vice versa. They're all there. Instant communication. Just float along."

Ned remembered the crowd pressing down on him in the subway, burying him in a grey mass of flesh and thought.

He had one thought, and that was to run.

Voices chanted inside his head. Ned could hear Hilda shouting above them all. And there was Baldanger's toothless whistle. Faces flashed before him, and he kept running. He ran through specters of Ingrid, Weissman, Deacon, Ladislas, and Taharahnugi. The church was buried behind him. Mirages flashed about him like fireflies on a moonless night. But it was midday and the sun was high in a perfect sky. There were no clouds to map the heavens, only eggshell blue.

The world was stable once again, and the sky was made of ice, cold and hard, moving closer to the ground with every breath he took.

## 4

And Ned ran as if he could escape Ahasuerus, Taharahnugi's dream, the ghosts howling inside his head, the mirages of the world, the world that was becoming one thought.

*"But what are you afraid of?"* asked Ahasuerus who was a small hard presence inside Ned's head.

"I want to wake up. I want out of your dreams."

*"You're in Taharahnugi's dream. He's a dreamer, too."*

"All the dreams are yours," Ned said. "You're matching them together."

Laughter inside and outside his head. The rocks, evergreens, stones, flowers, and yellow veined fronds called his name. Every step was a conversation. Gaily colored birds gabbled with the breeze. Scurrying animals were laughing in the mulch. The world was made of noises, sharp and subtle. The sky shouted to him. The sun winked and radiated laughter. The ground was soft and warm, filled


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with moist decay; a brook murmured, wind wheezed through brush, calling him.

"Why am I in Taharahnugi's dream?"

*"While you fight evolution, he gives himself up, and in so doing accumulates the world,"* Ahasuerus said. *"He dreams the past and accepts the fate of living souls."*

"What about the others?"

*"Your friends are all dreaming. Just as they accept Taharahnugi's dream, so will they accept yours. Merge them."*

*"You're the Rainbow Serpent made out of dreams."* shouted Taharahnugi amidst the laughter.

*"Take us into your dream,"* shouted Sandra.

*"Accept us,"* shouted Ingrid.

*"Merge the dreams,"* shouted Deacon. *"You divide us."*

*"Your thoughts and dreams are ours, as ours are yours,"* said Ahasuerus. *"Nothing is independant now."*

"And what about you?" Ned asked.

*"I am your thoughts combined with all the others. You are connected. Give up."*

*"Give up,"* rang a chorus of voices inside Ned's head.

"No," Ned shouted. "I am not connected. I am myself." He tried to run from the stone church and dream forests, from the stalking animals and colorful flyers. But he could never run away from the perfectly blue sky, an eggshell sky, a ceiling that Ned was afraid would crack open to reveal the props of Hell.

He ran from hillock to hillock, hoping to reach the limits of Taharahnugi's dream. Although he felt an urge to veer off toward the forest, which looked cool and comfortable and uniform, he continued across the meadowland toward where he imagined the cone fields might be. He stepped over blue flowers that whispered to him. But he ignored the world. He wanted familiar ground, the dry country of Goreme; he had a gut-feeling that he would not have a chance in Taharahnugi's dream, and he even dared to hope that he could pass through the dreams and find the world.

A parrot screamed in the distance. Ahead, Ned could make out the rough country of Goreme, but it was fuzzy, as if seen through gauzy scrims. It was quickly replaced by scrims of dream, by the dewy pastel shades of an African afternoon, by the glint of a faraway watering place, by a line of huge, mud-encrusted beasts feeding on high grass, by the howling of predators and the preyed-upon, by the chatter and clicking of insect and burrower. Goreme was another world, and Ned could not quite reach through this dream. But he had to escape. There could be no freedom here, he thought. Better to die in Hell and suffer the soul to whither.

The world of souls was converging upon him.

*"Give up,"* said Ahasuerus. *"You cannot run away. You're taking the world with you."*

"I want my own space and direction," Ned said. "Not yours. I won't be a figment of your dream."

*"What matter if we dream or not, or how we shape the world? We see the same things, feel the same sensations, all this so we may grasp the structure of the world. It's being put together in a new way, that's all."*

"It's your world, put together your way. I want the old world."

*"Liar. You found little happiness in that world which was built on the dreams of the dead. It was a tiny*



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*cosmos of old thoughts. But even then you were dreaming of Hell."*

"And you offer more of the same."

*"I offer you yourself, not the dead mythos of your past. I offer you evolution based on the workings of the soul, a new mythos."*

"No," Ned whispered, only to find that he was staring into a dark field. Another trick, he thought as he opened his eyes. "Another trick," he screamed. He had lain down in high grass, unmindful of the large brown insects crawling about. He was still a somnambulant dreaming himself through someone else's dreams.

He stood up, forced himself to take a step, and then another. Every step drained his strength; Ahasuerus, Taharahnugi, and the others were trying to pull him back. He felt as if the very air had congealed and turned viscid. It was as if he was trapped in the depths of a brightly lit ocean. The forests became jade coral reefs. The high grass was swaying seaweed. He was walking on the bottom of the ocean floor in some dim prehistoric age before man. He was moving in slow-motion. The world was alive, whispering to him, laughing at him.

*"Give up. Give up. Give up."* The world was breathing with him, counting his steps: *"Give up, give up, giveup-giveupgiveupgiveupgiveup."*

"No," he shouted back. He ran, walked, would not even pause for breath; his heart was a bird flapping wildly in his chest, his throat was on fire, and his head felt as if it was about to burst.

*"Giveupgiveupgiveupgiveupgiveup."*

And minutes stretched into hours and twigs crunched beneath his feet. he skirted the edge of a rainforest. The ground was mulch veined with black tubers and rotting climbers. Leaves and twigs turned into hilly moors separated by rills ahead. It was as if someone had swept the leaves to clear the land for the coming seasons of winter death and spring birth.

Ned was nearing the edge of Taharahnugi's dream, and the rest of the souls were massing behind him, pulling him back. There was a certain deadness to everything, as if the world was freezing up and all the other possibilities were becoming shadows, unrealizable until reality became fluid once again.

*"We're all inside one mind and ultimately are one mind,"* said Ahasuerus. *"Give up."*

Ned glimpsed something familar ahead.

*"You're just trading one dream for another."*

But there must be an end to the dreams, Ned thought.

Another step before time jelled around him, freezing him in the hot African sun.

*"Give up. Give up, give up, giveupgiveupgiveup."*

He felt the mass of souls around him like dead weight. He tore through the scrims of dream as if they were bits of brightly colored cloth. His thoughts created a din inside his head and were echoed by the thick-stemmed lianas, the high grass, the air, dead leaves, fleeing animals, ghosts, crickets and scratching insects, and borrowers and scurriers. His thoughts became transmogrified into Taharahnugi's dream. His fear and anger became large toothed beasts stalking through grassland. And the sky was noticeably lower. It touched the trees with frost.

I cannot die here, Ned thought, shivering, as if his sweat had turned to ice. He was thinking with Ahasuerus's voice. His head was bursting with noise and ideas. It was

(cont. on page 103)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# THE WHISPERERS

## RICHARD A. LUPOFF

*Richard Lupoff makes a rare appearance here in his own personna, the shade of Ova Hamlet completely absent, to tell a deceptively realistic story about a very old mythos in modern garb . . .*

## ILLUSTRATED by JOE STATON

THE SO-CALLED editorial office of Millbrook High School's student paper would never have been mistaken for the city room of the San Francisco *Chronicle* or even, to stick closer to home, the Marin *Independent-Journal*. A cardboard sign with hand-lettered copy was taped to the frosted glass; it said "Millbrook Hi-Life," and inside the musty room, wrestled a decade ago from a protesting language teacher, half a dozen battered desks crowded into an area suitable for half that number.

Karen Robertson sat behind the biggest of those desks. On its battered composition top stood a plastic sign announcing Karen's position, *Editor-in-Chief*, and on a rolling table beside the desk resided a battle-fatigued electric typewriter, its once bright paint-job suffering severely from the chips and fades.

Mario Cipolla and Annie Epstein sat in straight-backed chairs opposite Karen. All three were seniors at Millbrook High; another half a year and they would have their diplomas and be off for a final carefree summer before they started college. They'd been friends and schoolmates for a long time, but fall would see them scattered, to Cal across the bay in Berkeley, to the local College of Marin in nearby Kentfield, to USC nearly half a thousand miles due south.

But now, on this miserable Friday afternoon in January, with the northern California sky a sodden, depressing gray and a steady thrum of chilling rain descending, they clustered around Karen's desk discussing the assignment that Annie and Mario would head out on that evening.

"Nobody gets interviews with the Whisperers," Karen said, "are you really sure you can get in there, Annie?"

Annie shook back her long, rust-red hair. "My father says it's all set. We'll go in for the sound-check, then get our interview, and we have backstage passes for tonight's show."

Mario nodded his support of Annie. Almost unconsciously he dug a couple of fingers past the felt-tipped pen in his shirt pocket and reassured himself that the precious stage-door pass was still there. It was a small cloth square with the two words, *The Whisperers* in stylized lettering, and the Words *Winterland, San Francisco* and the date rubber-stamped beneath in special ink that would fluoresce beneath



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a special light.

He had an attache case with a miniature cassette recorder in it, along with his pad and pencils. Annie had her camera around her neck—he'd hardly ever seen her without it—and a gadget bag beside her chair, with extra lenses and film. He knew that flash equipment was *verboten* onstage, and that Annie, like the professional rock photographers, had learned to use ultra-fast films and wide apertures to capture their images by available stage lighting.

"I *am* a little nervous about the interview," Mario said. "You know, the Whisperers have had those big hit singles, 'Daemonium' and 'Erich Zann,' and I've seen them on television and all, but—" He shrugged.

"I've met lots of musicians," Annie replied. "Daddy's always bringing them up to the house to use the swimming pool or taking me to shows and introducing me to them. Most of them are perfectly ordinary people, and very nice."

Neither Mario nor Karen responded.

"Well," Annie resumed, "some of them are a little bit odd."

"I'll bet." Mario smoothed his medium-long hair. "The stories about weird carrying on, and drugs, and breaking up hotel rooms." He paused. "And groupies. They must all be strange people."

Annie said "No they're not. At least, not most of them. Not the ones I've met, and I've met practically every artist on the Dagon label, and a lot of others, that daddy's friends introduced me to—Elektra, London, Epic."

Mario began to pick up his case with the recorder. He got to his feet and headed for the corner of the newspaper office, reached for his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quilted downie jacket and rain-hood.

"Yeah, well, let's get going. We'll be going against the traffic but it's still going to be rush hour, especially in the city."

"Good luck!" Karen called after them. "Get a good story. We'll scoop everybody."

Mario and Annie headed down the hall, toward the front door of the school. It was after four o'clock, and by this time of day—especially by this time of Friday—Millbrook High was pretty nearly deserted.

They signed the late-exit book at the front door, headed down the steps hand-in-hand and sprinted across the front yard toward the student parking lot where Annie left the little Volvo 1800E that her father had given her for her senior present. She and Mario weren't exactly sweethearts—they'd both had dates with plenty of other kids, and had never got into the heavy senior scene—at least with each other—but they'd gone to parties and dances and generally hung around together ever since junior high. That was a long time.

Annie unlocked the door on the driver's side of the 1800. She looked across its sleek, rain-beaded roof at Mario. "Would you rather drive us into the city?"

He grinned. "Really, I would. I always feel kind of—strange—when a girl drives. You know?"

Annie said "That's pretty old-fashioned, Mario." But she walked around the car's long hood and handed him the keys, waiting for him to climb into the driver's seat and reach across to unlock the passenger door for her. She settled into the leather bucket seat, fumbled in her gadget bag and came up with a pair of phototropic Jerry Garcia glasses. She settled them on her nose. In the gloomy wet afternoon they were as clear as plain ground glass.

Mario clicked on the engine and eased the Volvo's floor-shift into its smooth and powerful lowest gear. He rolled it out of the parking lot, braked for the stop sign at the street, then headed onto Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and upshifted, cruising through the light traffic and the steady rain toward the freeway.

Out of the the corner of his eye he could see Annie doing something with her hands in the car's map compartment. "You looking for something?" he asked.

"Do you know the Whisperers' music?"

"Their singles."

"Well, here." Annie pulled a tape cartridge from the map drawer and slapped it into the Volvo's Bendix tape system. "This is their new album. It's called *Chthulhu*. Daddy brought it home for me. It's a promo advance copy, the album won't be out till next week. They're supposed to push it on this tour."

Mario shook his head and at the same time pulled around a big Oldsmobile station wagon that was filling a lane and a half of Sir. Francis. "Grocery shopping," he grumbled to himself.

The sound of water softly lapping at—what, a pier, the prow of a small boat—came from the car's quad mini-Bozak speakers. Slowly the sound rose, and rising with it and through it came the indescribable theremin-like wail of an Arp synthesizer, then a deep, bass throbbing. At first Mario thought it was a drum, but when it changed pitch he realized that it was a pounding Fender bass.

"That's—I know that," Mario said.

Now the vocal entered, the unearthly multi-tracked female voice


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that he had heard often before.

"That's 'Styx River Boatman,' " he said. "I've heard that plenty of times."

"Right. It's the lead track on *Chthulhu*. The single's been out for a month. Now they hit with the album and the tour. They ought to go gold on both of them. The single's already charted with a bullet and—"

"I don't know what you're talking about, Annie."

"Oh. It's music business shop talk. Daddy always talks about his work, and most of our friends are in the business. What I mean is, the Whisperers are going to be the biggest group around by the end of the year."

Mario made a sound something like *hmmf*. He dropped the thread of conversation, let the music fill his ears while he kept his eyes carefully on his driving. He'd banged a fender on the family Apollo last fall and still hadn't heard the last of it. Most of the other kids in his class had cars of their own, or at least got to use their parents' cars, and here he was riding on buses or begging rides.

The boulevard curved around and he took a ramp that ran from it onto the freeway. He dropped the Volvo into third, then down into second when he saw the traffic on the freeway. There was a break between a Plymouth Duster and a blue-flecked wide-open dune buggy—must be somebody headed home from Stinson Beach—and Mario had the 1800 onto the freeway, across into the center lane and accellerating in the space of a quadrophonic synthesizer howl.

"Very nice," Annie applauded.

"Listen," Mario said, "we better do a good job on this. You're sure this is the only interview they're giving on this gig?"

"Yep."

He shook his head. "I'd just expect Wasserman to get it then, or Phil Elwood from the *Examiner*."

The freeway wound and swooped through the hills between Mill Valley and Sausalito, plunged through the twin tunnels and slanted down the long grade toward the Golden Gate Bridge. To their right the green wintry hills were bathed in ghostly shreds of fog that had worked their way in from the Pacific and through the Marin valleys. To their left the bay was a dismal sheet of water, its surface pocked with a million impacts a minute.

"They're only doing it as a favor to Daddy," Annie called him back from his revery. "I told you that."

"Oh—well, I'm just surprised, that's all. If they wouldn't do it for the *dailies*, you know, I thought they'd give an interview to somebody from *Rolling Stone*, you know. Ben Fong-Torres or somebody, and Jim Marshall would shoot it or Annie Liebovitz. Or they could have that guy from *Ramparts* and Michael Gazaris could shoot it. Did you see those shots he got of Jagger last time the Stones played?"

Mario missed Annie's answer as he braked for the toll plaza at the northern end of the bridge. He put the 1800 into first and pulled away from the gate, settled for a steady 45 as they cut through the raindrops. Not yet five o'clock, yet the sun was gone, the sky a gray approaching black, the bridge illuminated only by the ghastly glare of its pink-orange high-intensity lamps.

They crossed the bridge without further conversation, the only sounds those of the tap system working its way from track to track of the Whisperers' new album and of the car's progress through the frigid rain: the


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drops drumming on the hood and roof of the Volvo, the *beat-swish, beat-swish* of the wipers, the shush of the car's four new Pirelli radials on the wet asphalt of the roadway.

The Friday commuter traffic was heavier now, snarled and made more dense than normal by the steady rainfall. Mario swung the Volvo around the lazy curve from the bridge onto Doyle Drive, all but overwhelmed by the sheer massive numbers of the cars and commuter buses moving in the opposite direction. He made his way past the neo-corinthian Palace of Fine Arts, down ugly Lombard Street with its neon motels and grimy gasoline stations, and turned onto Fillmore.

A line of cars stopped him at the traffic light at Union Street. From the seat beside him Annie asked if he could see the dingy little store they'd just passed. Mario looked back. "What, that button shop?"

"Know what used to be there?"

Mario shook his head.

"That was the original Matrix. Daddy says that he took me there when I was a little girl. I can hardly remember it. All of the bands played there back in the beginning. The Airplane, the Doors, the Warlocks, the New Riders. That was back in Flower Power times."

"That little place?" Mario cast a last glance over his shoulder, then followed a Porsche 914 as it pulled across Union. The Porsche dived into a parking space and Mario gunned the 1800 uphill in second. "How could they make a living playing in a joint like that?"

"I could never understand that either. Daddy says they lived on peace and love and holiness."

"Yeah. Just like the Whisperers, right? Or do they have a different trip going?"

"They sure do. They're making plenty. Daddy says they got a recording advance from Dagon and they're cleaning up on their tours and TV gigs. There was no such thing as rock on TV back in the old days, Daddy says, unless you could get on Ed Sullivan's show like Elvis or the Beatles."

Mario said "Who's Ed Sullivan?"

Annie said "I think he was something like Dick Clark, I'm not sure."

"Yeah."

The Whisperers' new album *Chthulhu* wound up with a typically weird, heavy number with odd words about somebody called the Reanimator. Annie pulled the cartridge from the Bendix unit and replaced it with the Whisperers' first album, *Anubis*.

The classic white apartment buildings of Pacific Heights gradually gave way to crumbling tenements as Fillmore Street changed from a high-price, old-line neighborhood into a grimy ghetto street. "Places like this give me the creeps," Mario grumbled. He held the wheel with one hand and checked his door-latch with the other.

Annie said nothing.

"Look," Mario went on nervously, "you really know so much more about the whole music business than I do, I'm not so sure about this interview, Annie."

She shook her head, her reddish hair swinging into the edge of Mario's field of vision. "You don't have enough confidence, Mario. I always read your stuff, and we've done stories together before. Don't worry, relax, you'll do fine."

He found a parking place next to a boarded-up, deserted church on Sutter Street, and backed the Volvo into it. "I hope the car'll be safe here," he said, reaching behind the bucket seats



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for his cassette recorder in its attache case.

"It'll be safe, Mario."

"I don't know. A nice car in a neighborhood like this, maybe we should put it in the Miyako."

Annie ignored the suggestion. She hoisted her gadget bag onto her shoulder and climbed out of the car.

They walked together past a row of Japanese restaurants catering to visiting Asian businessmen and tourists and people arriving early for the show at Winterland. Mario looked at his watch. "We can get some dinner after we do the interview, then go back for the show afterwards."

Annie agreed.

They walked up Post to Steiner Street, then continued past the corner to the stage door of the cavernous concert hall. Mario rapped on the door with a fifty-cent piece, the echo of the metallic clash sounding off the concrete walls and sidewalk. "Will your dad be here, Annie?"

"He said he might come over for the show," she answered, shaking her head, "but he was stuck in a meeting all day. At least he told me this morning that he expected to be. So we should just go ahead."

"Okay."

The stage door, a heavy sheet of iron rivetted onto creaking hinges, swung open slowly and a hostile face glowered out at them.

"Uh—the Whisperers are expecting us," Mario muttered.

"Show's sold out," the doorman growled.

"Um—no, uh. We—"

The doorman slammed the heavy iron door shut.

Mario looked at Annie forlornly, then remembered. He unzipped the front of his waterproofed jacked, fished his backstage pass out and held it in front of him. Annie grinned and hefted her heavy gadget bag to show where she'd stuck her own pass to its side.

Marion rapped on the iron again. After a few seconds the door creaked open and the doorman's face, more hostile than ever, appeared once more. Mario shoved his pass forward so the doorman could see it.

The doorman stopped, gazed unimpressed at the backstage pass and said "Show's not for four hours. That doesn't get you into the soundcheck." He started to close the door again but it stopped at Mario's heavy hiking boot—the kind that all the kids as Millbrook High were wearing this year. The doorman's expression turned from one of general hostility to personal rage. "Say—"

"The Whisperers are expecting us. It was all set up by Dagon Records. You'd better check on it. They'll be pretty upset when they find out, otherwise."

The doorman grumbled incoherently, then said "I'll go ask their manager Bart Starke about it. You better be straight with me or it's no backstage, I don't care about any passes. And take your foot out of my door before I cut it off."

Mario reluctantly withdrew his boot. The door slammed shut. Mario turned toward Annie. "Nice fellow. I wonder why he hates me?"

"He doesn't hate you." Annie smiled at him. Mario could see the rain beading up on her forehead and the edges of her hair that extended beyond the nylon hood of her jacket. In the ghastly light of a billboard lamp advertising the Whisperers' forthcoming album, the only light on this side of the Winterland auditorium, the rainwater puddled and ran like icy perspiration.


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He doesn't hate you," she repeated, "that's just old Gooley the doorman. He'd have a thousand gate-crashers or groupies or assorted rip-offs in here every night if he didn't come on a little bit heavy, Mario."

"Hmmph."

They stood in the chilling rain waiting for Gooley's return. After a while the iron door creaked open for the third time. Gooley looked a little less hostile and angry than he had before. He made a gesture with his hand and Annie and Mario stepped over a low iron bulkhead that separated the dingily painted floor inside the doorway from the littered gray cement outside.

"Starke says okay." Gooley gestured over his shoulder, toward a short, narrow staircase that led up to a half-elevated platform level.

A heavyset middle aged man was standing on the platform. His jowly face was ringed with a fringe of graying hair. He wore a rumpled gray tweed jacket and baggy brown flannel pants. He smiled thinly at Mario and Annie.

"You the kids from the school paper?"

"Yes sir."

"I'm Bart Starke. Hal Epstein from Dagon said you were all right."

"Mr. Epstein is my father," Annie said.

Starke repeated his smile, more thinly than ever. "Yeah. Look; my kids are just starting their sound-check. You go make yourselves comfy and you can talk to Johnny and Olly after." He jerked his thumb toward a wooden door.

Mario and Annie crossed the room toward the new door. Mario leaned his head toward Annie's and hissed "Johnny and Olly?"

"The Whisperers," she answered softly. "Johnny Kendrick and Olivia Oldham, didn't you do your homework, Mario?"

"Oh, okay." He put his hand on the tarnished brass door knob and pushed the wooden panel ahead of them. "Sure. I just never thought of Olivia Oldham as Olly, that's all."

Inside the big auditorium they made their way to the first bank of ancient, patched seats that flanked the dance floor. Annie tossed a quick look around the cavernous room, studied the stage for a few seconds and then busied herself over her gadget bag. Mario put down his attache case and settled into a dust-soaked cushion, then turned his own gaze to the stage that rose as tall as a man at the end of the auditorium.

The Whisperers were already in their places while sound technicians and lighting crew scuttered around them, checking cables, setting monitor speakers, aligning spots. The workers to a man wore battered blue jeans and soiled tee-shirts, unconscious parodies, Mario thought, of an ancient Marlon Brando screen image.

The only musical instrument visible on the stage was Johnny Kendrick's white Arp synthesizer; the synthesizer, and two mikes atop their chromium stands, a gigantic sound console at one side of the stage and a towering bank of Acoustic 12-inch and 18-inch speaker cabinets under Ampeg V6c amp tops.

"Hey, don't they work with a full band?" Mario asked Annie.

She shook her head, pulling her attention away from the camera gear she'd been assembling. "Just them. All the rest is on tape—all the other instruments and the effects." She turned back to the 135 mm lens she'd been screwing onto her Nikon F2 body for ultra-long closeups.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mario said "But—isn't that—I don't know, not quite—uh, *ethical* or something? I mean, this isn't a discotheque."

"Perfectly normal. Pink Floyd travelled with taped effects for years. First artist ever to go all out was Todd Rundgren—"

"Uhg!"

"Well anyway, he did a whole set right in this room with a whole band on tape. Just Runt and a guitar and a deck."

"Hmph!"

The technicians silted away from the stage. Mario saw Annie slip away from the plush seats, glide out onto the middle of the gymnasium-sized dance floor to take some long shots of the Whisperers; tonight she'd use her backstage pass to get into the wings or onto the edge of the stage itself for live shots.

Johnny Kendrick was standing behind the Arp keyboard, Olivia Oldham at her mike at center stage. They started playing and singing their newest single. Mario looked at Johnny for a moment: he was dressed in a black satin stage outfit with crimson flashing. A heavy textured gold chain hung around his neck, with a huge clear jewel flashing red beneath the spots.

His hair was long, hanging in straight, glossy black planes on either side of his dark, serious face. He wore a dark moustache. Omar Sharif, Mario thought, made up to look like a satanic priest. He reached instinctively to finger a set of rosary beads he'd thrown in a garbage pail five years earlier. He turned his gaze to Annie Epstein.

The auditorium was in nearly total darkness, the only light in the great room the reflection of the stage lights and the spots that blazed from the balcony lighting booth. The stage lighting cycled through dazzling white, orange, red, green, blue and back to white.

Annie was pointing her Minolta light meter at the Whisperers, barely visible expressions of annoyance and distraction chasing each other across her round, animated face with each alteration in the lighting. In her bulky quilted jacket and ragged jeans, with her wire-rimmed glasses and rain-frizzed hair she looked like the underground comic book hippy chick Pudge.

Mario left the dusty plush seats and moved out onto the big dance floor himself. He turned back to face the stage; from this distance the elevation of the platform mattered only a little, and he could see the Whisperers without the distortion that would annoy a front-row listener and watcher.

They'd cut their first number short—no need to run through all of it at a sound check—and Olivia had turned her back to the "audience," to walk to Johnny's Arp and lean over it, conferring with him. After a little while the two musicians nodded their heads in agreement on some point and Olivia walked away from the synthesizer and back to her microphone. She made a small gesture with her left hand and a low, eerie sound began to filter through the giant speaker banks behind the stage. It was the unearthly lead-in to another Whisperers number.

Mario watched Olivia Oldham: she was a complete contrast to Kendrick. Where his hair was like jet hers was a glistening blonde that picked up each color in turn from the glaring lights; under the white glare it looked as pale as Johnny Winter's. Her face was thin and pale; when she smiled or


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sang Mario–could see the play of every tendon and muscle in her face and her throat. When she gestured—she had a peculiar, fascinating way of holding her fingers, as if she were grasping some invisible line for support—he could almost feel her touching him.

He shuddered and squeezed his eyes shut, then opened them again. The stage lights were off for the moment, and the Whisperers were bathed in separate spotlights: Johnny Kendrick in a deep blue that emphasized his satanic appearance; Olivia Oldham in an almost tangible deluge of red that made her platinum hair, her pale, thin face, her billowing white dress a montage of crimson textures.

Almost involuntarily Mario sat down, cross-legged on the hard wooden floor.

He'd heard all of the Whisperer's music before: their singles on the radio for the past year and a half since they'd appeared out of dusty midwestern obscurity, their two released albums *Anubis* and *Nightshade* the past few nights at home as he prepped for the big interview, the new *Chthulhu* in the Volvo 1800 on the way to Winterland today. But he'd never heard them before like this.

He watched the Whisperers on the stage. Under those lights, he thought, and with the auditorium itself in almost total darkness, the Whisperers could hardly know there was anyone present beside their technical crew. Yet the way the moved, looked and sang. . . .

It was almost as if Mario were being carried away on some sort of astral journey, carried away by two creatures of some sort of—preternatural essences, of darkness and of light, pure distillates of yin and of yang, elemental embodiments of the male and female principles of being.

The colors cycled, the dark Kendrick and the pale Olivia were transformed from orange to red to green to blue; the eerie sounds coming from the big Ampeg/Acoustic towers seemed to whisper to him personally. He could almost understand what the Whisperers were saying to him, almost feel Olivia Oldham's tremulous, *needing* touch—

"You're not on something, are you, kid?"

Mario flinched away from the heavy hand that was shaking him roughly by one shoulder. He blinked his eyes and saw that Johnny Kendrick and Olivia Oldham were gone from the stage; the house lights were on and half a dozen casually dressed technicians were rechecking every piece of equipment.

Turning, Mario saw the jowly face of Barton Starke peering into his face. Starke looked annoyed. He was chewing a fat brown cigar, or at least the last inch or so that remained of one. Mario blinked up at him and grunted in confusion. He pressed both his hands on the floor and started to stand up.

"I said, you *on* something, kid?"

Mario shook his head. "N-no sir. I was just, ah. . . ."

"Yeah," Starke nodded. "You got carried away with the music. All right, I don't want nobody coming around here stoned out on anything, you know? The customers are bad enough, but that's not my problem. You want that interview, you better get backstage now and do it before my kids go to take their nap before the show." He jerked his hand toward the door that led from the auditorium to the backstage area where they'd


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first entered the building.

Mario rubbed his hands over his own face, picked up his attache case with the cassette equipment in it and started for the door. He was starting to get back together now. He could see that Annie had picked up her gadget bag and was a few paces ahead of him. He caught up to her as they reached the door and stepped through it directly behind her, Starke following at his heels.

He stumbled through the door, through the cold, drab room he'd been in earlier, up the stairway where he'd first seen Barton Starke. There was still a slight ringing in Mario's ears—surely the after-effect of the overwhelming loudspeakers in the auditorium—and his eyes had apparently not returned altogether to normal after the odd visual experience.

Annie Epstein seemed to have gone off somewhere, maybe to change lenses or load a fresh roll of tri-X. Mario stopped at the top of the stairs and looked back but he didn't see anyone—not Starke, not the doorman Gooley, not any of the stage hands or technicians.

He put his hand on the doorknob and went through into another room. It was dimly lighted—he couldn't tell whether there were recessed electric bulbs somewhere or whether the light came entirely from the candles that stood on low shelves. The room seemed to be furnished in dark plush, ancient black velvet cushions and maroon drapes.

There was an odor in the air—something musty, yet somehow sweet. He turned to look back at the door but it seemed to have receded, or else Mario had unconsciously advanced to the middle of the room. He looked down and saw that he was standing in the center of a dark, heavily patterned carpet. He tried to follow the pattern with his eyes: it wove tortuously, seemed almost to present an objective picture of—something. But he couldn't quite make out what it was, not in the dimness, the wavering illumination of the dark room.

There was a sound of swishing draperies and he saw a pale figure standing beside one of the candles. It was Olivia Oldham; in the flickering candlelight she looked slimmer than ever, and far more pale. Her hair looked almost pure white, and to Mario she seemed, for an instant, not to be the very young woman she had seemed on the stage.

For the first time he could see her eyes clearly: they were pale, too, like everything else about her. He couldn't tell what color they were: a pale, pale blue, or perhaps a whitened golden tint that picked up flickers of candlelight and gleamed at him across the room.

Olivia Oldham said "Hi."

The single syllable, softly uttered, struck Mario like an electric shock. He hadn't expected her to speak, somehow: as absurd as that seemed, even to him. She had seemed like a creature from some other plane of existence. To hear her commonplace greeting was more astounding than it would have been to see her slowly fade into invisibility.

She crossed the room toward him and put her hand out as if for him to take it.

"You're Mr. Cipolla? Please make yourself comfortable. Would you like anything? A cup of tea?" She gestured, and beside one of the candles, where Mario could not imagine not noticing it, there was a plain tray with a pot and cups. He barely managed to croak out an affirmative response.

Olivia's voice was—somehow soft


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and low, like a whisper, yet plentifully clear to him. Mario found himself sitting on a plush velvet bench. He felt somehow clumsy and inadequate.

Olivia Oldham, unbelievably fragile-seeming, sat beside him, a cup in her hands. Mario looked into her eyes. They *were* golden. He realized suddenly that she was the most beautiful person he'd ever seen, that he was—he felt himself turning crimson and hot.

He fumbled for his notebook, his recorder. "Uh—there's—Annie said her father had—"

"Annie went with John Kendrick." Olivia sipped at her cup, raised her eyes to look up at him as she did. "To get some shots in better light. Brighter light, that is."

"Uh." Mario tried a sip of the tea himself. He'd heard stories of the strange backstage scenes at places like this, of the dangers and the temptations. He looked at Olivia. She seemed completely at home in this dim, plush room, her white gown almost floating about her like the soft wavering fins of some delicate tropical fish. Mario's head felt light, his body seemed to tingle. He took another sip of the hot orange tea.

Outside, he reminded himself, the world was going on. He was here to do an interview for his school paper, Olivia Oldham was a singer, half of the Whisperers, that was all. And not forty feet away, outside this place, San Francisco was going about its rainy Friday night routine: late commuters still heading for the bridge to Marin, tourists from Omaha and from Osaka riding up and down the city's hills on cable cars, freaks from Berkeley and what was left of the Haight cueing up right now at the front door of Winterland—

He snapped his head up and looked at Olivia Oldham. "Uh—where's—uh—where did you start, um. . . ." If only he could get the interview going, get back in control of the situation somehow. But Olivia seemed to be making that peculiar gesture with her fingers, and Mario found it harder and harder to move.

She took the cup from him hands, put it back on the shelf. She stood before him and drew him up to his feet.

"Uh, I meant to ask you . . ." he plowed doggedly on, trying to clear his head. If he could get some fresh air. It was so stuffy in this room, the peculiar odor in here. He looked at Olivia, and couldn't tell whether she was very tiny or whether she towered over him, whether the room itself was crowding in or retreating to monstrous dimensions.

"Oh," he tried once more, "the, ah, the Whisperers—"

She smiled at him and nodded encouragingly.

"Ah, you have unusual material, I mean, ah, why do you write songs about such, ah, morbid topics? Like, ah, you new album. What does Chthulhu mean? Doesn't it have something to do with ah, some old, ah—?"

"Yes," she nodded, "it is an old tradition. Very old. You might even call it an old religion. Those who know of the Elder Gods. Those who would open the way once more."

"But why the Whisperers? I mean, if it's a religion—"

"A religion that was suppressed a million years ago. A religion that existed only in secret places, only in isolated villages. A religion that was discovered and secretly attacked again, and nearly wiped out fifty years ago. You can read of it, you can find it all in the works of the Providence writ-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

er."

"But—but—" Mario stammered.

"But now," Olivia went on, "Now we have the way. Tonight you will see. Tonight you will see four thousand young people swaying and chanting with us, moving in the ritual steps, calling back the Elder Gods, worshipping, worshipping."

Her thin hands holding his seemed to be made of iron, strong and resistless; she seemed to tower above his head, her eyes gleaming, her white flowing dress seeming to flutter and whirl with a life of its own, as if it were not mere cloth, but a sentient thing.

"But why do you tell me this? Won't you be destroyed again? I'll write about you, we'll print it. Annie's photos—"

Her shrill laughter cut into his voice, and from behind him there came more laughter, deeper. He whirled and saw Johnny Kendrick standing, the candlelight reflecting from the black satin of his suit and the red of its flashing, of the great jewel that hung from its filligreed chain. Beside Kendrick stood Annie, her face blankly expressionless.

"Four thousand people," Kendrick said softly. "Four thousand young people, full of the vital energy needed to feed the beast, to summon the opener, to bring back the Elder Gods.

"We let you come so there *would* be a record of this great night. Use your best words, boy." He turned to Annie. "Use your best skill, girl. Tonight is a night that will live forever. And in coming days, as the mighty sounds of the Chthulhu music drive from millions of speakers, drive through millions of brains, the mighty one will hear. He will rise. The Elder Gods will return."

Kendrick stepped to the door, opened it, snapped "Starkel! Send that nuisance Gooley for some food for us. Get enough for our guests. We have to be considerate of the power of the press!"

He laughed, and slammed the door shut.

—RICHARD A. LUPOFF

---

**ON SALE IN OCTOBER AMAZING (JULY 19th)**

**A WORLD OF ONE'S OWN,** A Complete short novel by **DAVE BISCHOFF & TED WHITE, NEVER SO LATE** by **F.M. BUSBY, FAR FROM EVE AND MORNING** by **THOMAS F. MONTELEONE, THE SLEEPING BEAST** by **A. BERTRAM CHANDLER, THE KING IS DEAD: LONG LIVE THE QUEEN!** by **STEPHEN TALL** and many more stories and features.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# FLEUVE RED

## ROBERT F. YOUNG

*Robert Young returns with a sequel to his "The Earth Books" (last issue) in which the author again follows his Muse to an unlikely world . . .*

## ILLUSTRATED by RICHARD OLSEN

WELL, here I am on Alpheratz VI.

"Be sure and take your umbrella," my Muse told me just before I left Earth. "On Alpheratz VI it rains three hundred and sixty-four days out of the year."

As usual, she was exaggerating. I would estimate Alpheratz VI's rainfall to be about that of Earth's. The temperature and the topography aren't much different either.

Immediately after my arrival, I chose a commodious country named Vespucha to live in and a colorful city named Serice to write in. Then I set about learning the Vespuchan language. In this, I was assisted by a beautiful native girl named Wenda, and it is she to whom I am indebted for my present prowess in the conjugation of Vespuchan verbs and the diagraming of Vespuchan sentences.

Not only did Wenda help me learn the language, she got me a room in a pleasant inn and kept me company between lessons. She is a tall, willowy girl with chestnut hair and luminous gray eyes. I owe her a great deal. Almost as much as I owe my Muse.

I hadn't been on Alpheratz VI very long before I became acquainted with the brome. This unique herbivore is endowed by nature with circular appendages instead of feet, and it rolls instead of running. It is covered with curious, fuzz-like hair that reflects light, and is all one color—generally blue or red or yellow, although green ones aren't unusual. Broad and low-slung, it has three eyes, two of which are round, phosphorescent, and located just above the fore-appendages, and the third of which is rectangular, exceedingly large, and located just beyond the long snout, forming the front part of the slightly slanted hump that comprises the creature's back.

The brome is used by the Vespuchans both as a beast of burden and as a means of transportation. Sometimes they ride on its back, but most of the time they ride on carriages attached to its rearend by means of a light wooden pole. The carriages are unique in their own right. They're constructed principally of wood, painted various colors, have an overall length of about ten feet and consist of a "tonneau" and a "forestructure". The former is cylindrical and rests on four articulated stilts with inflated rubber bases; the latter joins the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

former at a 45" angle, is slightly tapered and terminates in an oblong horizontal trunk for carrying baggage.

Inside the tonneau there's a device called a "shuttleplate" that's connected to the four articulated stilts via four different gear trains. The back-and-forth motion created in the shuttle-plate when the brome pulls the carriage is transmitted via the different gear trains to the stilts, causing then to rise, swing forward and lower in alternating sequence. Extra stress upon either of the two fore-stilts, as when the brome turns right or left, causes it to disengage from the shuttle-plate and function as a pivot till stress returns to normal.

Bromes are taught to respond to four simple commands—a trisyllabic one meaning *Go* and three monosyllabic ones meaning *Stop, Turn left* and *Turn right* respectively. Lines held in the carriage driver's hands and attached to the hubs of the brome's fore-appendages provide additional control.

After my introduction to this remarkable conveyance, I concluded naturally enough that Vespuchan ingenuity had outdone itself and that further innovations in the field of transportation couldn't fail to be anti-climactic. Consider my amazement then, when, returning from a stroll late one afternoon, I saw a Vespuchan riding on a rapidly moving carriage *that was unattached to a brome!*

THE BROMELESS CARRIAGE was made primarily of metal instead of wood and differed from brome-drawn ones in certain other respects. On the front of its baggage trunk were two tiny headlamps, and just above them were two pointed knobs—clearly controls of some kind. It sounded different too. Brome-drawn carriages emit a faint


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clacking noise caused by the vacillations of their shuttle-plates; this one emitted a continuous series of *puts*, which, as nearly as I could determine, came from an orifice in its rear region that was partly hidden by a curious queue of fine, wool-like wires.

I wasted no time in finding Wenda and describing the phenomenon to her. It was then that I learned that on the east bank of the Serice River, just south of the city, there is a factory devoted exclusively to the manufacture of locomobiles, as these bromeless carriages are called. They are nothing new, Wenda told me, but as yet they're relatively rare because before the introduction of revolutionary production techniques by the owner and builder of the Serice River Plant, producing them in sufficient quantities to create a market wasn't practicable. The locomobile I'd seen was merely one of the forerunners of thousands—more likely, millions—to come.

The very next morning Wenda, who is as much at home among the upper echelons of Serice society as she is among the lower, took me to visit the Serice River Plant and introduced me to its owner and builder, whose office is on the 26th floor of the towering Administrative & Engineering Building. He proved to be a quiet, unassuming man of medium height somewhere in his 50's who, when I inadvertently referred to him as an "inventor" immediately disclaimed the honor. His name is Enryh Ordf.

Word had already got around that I was a writer, and since the Vespuchan language doesn't differentiate between the terms "writer" and "journalist", Mr. Ordf naturally assumed that my reason for visiting him was to do a piece on him and his factory for one of the Vespuchan periodicals. I saw no point in disillusioning him. After Wenda left, he offered me a cigar, and both of us lit up. Then he stepped over to a big bay window behind his desk and beckoned to me to join him.

He pointed. "Those corrugated-steel structures way in the background are the Serice River Steel Mill. That big blue building in the middle distance is the Serice River Stamping Plant. The ferrous foundry's on one side of it, the non-ferrous on the other. Those long warehouses next to the river are for storing the parts and material that are shipped in from other Ordf factories, including the engines that make the locomobiles go. The long building in the foreground running kitty-corners to this one is the Serice River Assembly Plant. If you'll strain your eyes just a little you'll be able to see the new Ordfs that have just come off the assembly line being driven onto the rivercraft moored at the docks."

I squinted into the morning sunlight. Sure enough, a steady stream of shiny new Ordfs was emerging from the end of the building and flowing up a boarding ramp onto the deck of one of a quartet of river boats.

I was awed. Not so much by the magnitude of the Serice River Plant as by the magnitude of the Vespuchan who had built it. On the surface, he might seem as common as an old shoe, and on paper, he might seem no more than an engineer turned entrepreneur; but I knew I was standing beside a genius such as Alpheratz VI has never seen before and will probably never see again. I wished fervently that I *were* a journalist so that I *could* give the Vespuchan people a stirring story about him and his factory; but being a mere creative writer, all I could do was stand there and gape.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Ordf stepped over to the door. "Come along," he said. "I'm hard-pressed for time, but I can spare enough of it to show you how Ordfs are put together."

WE DESCENDED from his aerie through successive layers of offices teeming with administrators, executives, engineers, technicians, bookkeepers, secretaries, receptionists and just plain office girls, to the ground floor. Presently we stepped outside, and Mr. Ordf led the way to the Assembly Plant, from which weird medleys of clangs, crashes and screeches were emanating. Just inside the entrance, a series of steel stairs led upward to a lofty catwalk, and when Mr. Ordf began mounting them, I followed.

At first, after gaining the catwalk and looking down, I couldn't make heads or tails out of what was going on below. But I gradually sorted things out as I walked along the catwalk in Mr. Ordf's wake: the moving platform immediately below and running the entire length of the building was a conveyor; the miscellany of objects hanging on hooks just above and within easy reach of the workers were tools; and the metal objects of various shapes and sizes piled behind the workers were the components, or parts, of Ordfs-to-be.

I saw these remarkable vehicles grow from piles of nuts and bolts into semi-cylindrical tonneaus, into full-fledged tonneaus, and into one-stilted, two-stilted, three-stilted and four-stilted tonneaus. Presently, far below, I saw workers lifting the forestructures into place and securing them with rivets.

"In designing Ordfs," Mr. Ordf shouted above the din, "we stuck pretty close to basic carriage-design. It's sound, and people've become pretty well accustomed to it. So an Ordf doesn't look a great deal different from an ordinary brome-drawn carriage—on the outside. The inside, though—that's another matter. In Ordfs, those forestructures you see being attached are more than just glorified baggage-compartments: they house the fuel tanks too. The top part of the trunk lifts up, just as in the brome-drawn carriage type; but on the bottom of the baggage compartment is a tube that runs down into the tank, making it easy to fill 'er up whenever it's necessary. Naturally the tube is kept capped at all other times to prevent spillage."

The two pointed knobs I'd noticed on the trunk of the bromeless carriage I'd seen in Serice were missing from the forestructures below. I asked Mr. Ordf where they were and what they were for.

"They'll be installed later," he replied. "The one on the left lights the headlamps and the one on the right blows the horn, both of which'll also be installed later, as well as the tonneau storage-battery they draw on."

We had continued walking along the catwalk and were now directly above an oval vat brimming with brown fluid. The conveyor ended on one side of it, then began again on the other. Over it, a winch swung rhythmically back and forth, lifting each Ordf-to-be by means of a sling passed beneath its undercarriage by two workers, dipping it into the brown fluid, then lifting it out and setting it down on the second section of the conveyor, where a second pair of workers removed the sling. The Ordf was then borne between two opposing rows of powerful blowers that dried it to a crisp, lustrous brown.

I was favorably impressed by the efficiency of the operation, but one


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

point puzzled me. "Is that the *only* vat?" I asked Mr. Ordf.

He nodded. "The undercoat's incorporated in the lacquer."

I saw he hadn't got my point. "I mean," I elaborated, "don't you paint them other colors besides brown?"

"Of course not!"

"But Mr. Ordf, suppose some of your customers should want red Ordfs or blue Ordfs or yellow Ordfs?"

He laughed. "They can have any color they want—so long as it's brown!"

I let the matter drop.

FOR SOME TIME NOW I'd noticed certain individuals on the floor below who differed somewhat from the workers and who didn't seem to be engaged in any of the operations. They wore shiny black suits with leather elbow pads, black caps with long, pointed visors, and square-toed black shoes. All of them carried little black notebooks in which they periodically made entries with stubby yellow pencils. For the most part, they stood some distance back from the assembly line, sometimes between the piles of parts, but every once in a while one of them would run over to one of the workers, shouting at the top of his voice and waving his arms.

Finally my curiosity got the better of me, and I asked Mr. Ordf who they were. "Why, they're my foremen, of course," he replied.

"But there's so many of them!" I gasped. "Surely your employees don't need *that* much supervision!"

"Supervision's only part of their job. What they're there for mostly is to find ways to speed up production so we can cut costs. My aim it to produce Ordfs everybody can afford, and to do that I have to keep upping the daily quota. The more unnecessary motions my foremen eliminate, the more machine-like and efficient the workers become. Eventually, of course, everything you see being done here today by unskilled labor will be done by regular machines."

"But Mr. Ordf," I objected, "I know little about such matters, but aren't regular machines—except perhaps prohibitively expensive ones—incapable of performing any but the simplest of tasks, and as time goes on, won't more and more improvements and additions cause locomobiles to become more and more complicated?"

"Not in *my* factory!" Enryh Ordf said.

"Perhaps not in yours, sir. But sooner or later, won't other entrepreneurs—if they haven't already—build other factories? And lacking your idealism, won't they deliberately add accessories to their vehicles and keep changing their lines in order to attract more customers and justify higher prices? And won't such practices eventually complicate locomobiles to such an extent that making them with machines will be economically unfeasible?"

"What *they* do is no concern of mine!"

"But you'll have to compete with them. And to do so successfully, you'll have to complicate *your* locomobiles too. So won't you wind up being even more dependent on unskilled labor than you are now, and if machines ever take over the jobs in other industries, won't the locomobile industry feel kind of foolish?"

"Bosh!" Enryh Ordf said. But I could see he was worried.

BELOW US, workers were raising the hinged upper sections of the tonneaus and lowering large multi-finned mechanisms into the interiors of the Ordfs by means of a chainfall. These



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were the engines that made the Ordfs go, Mr. Ordf informed me. As I watched, other mechanisms were set into place and installed. One of these, I learned, was the steering unit, which, in response to pressure exerted on either of two "knee-plates" incorporated in the tonneau's sides, causes one of the two fore-stilts to function as a pivot for the duration of the pressure.

The engine intrigued me most, and I asked Mr. Ordf how it worked. "Basically what it does," he explained, "is employ a series of alternating explosions to move four pistons back and forth in four elongated horizontal cylinders at a speed governed by the frequency of the explosions. Each piston is attached to one of the stilts by a connecting rod that's so designed that when it's engaged it lifts the stilt up as the piston moves forward and lowers it just before the piston moves back. All our engines are timed to produce what we call a 'double alternate stilt-movement'—right rear stilt, right front stilt, left rear stilt, left front stilt, and so forth. Any number of other 'gaits' are possible, but we've found that this one provides the smoothest ride with a minimum of wear and tear on the engine. As yet, we haven't devised a means of making an Ordf back up, or of braking it; but we're working on both problems."

"How do you cause the explosions?" I asked.

"Putting it as simply as possible, we vaporize a combustible fuel, combine it with air and force it into the cylinders, where it's ignited by a spark."

"And where do you get the fuel?"

"By distilling grain. Oh, we don't do it ourselves—the grain distilleries do. Wheat, corn, rye, oats. For some reason nobody's been able to figure out yet, locomobiles run best on fuel distilled from oats."

THE REST of the operations were anticlimactic and involved the installation of such uninspiring items as storage batteries, headlamps, horns, exhaust pipes, exhaust filters (the queues of fine, wool-like wires that cover the exhaust vents), seats, and so forth. The last item to be set in place was the instrument panel, which is located at the juncture of the tonneau and the forestructure.

Finally Mr. Ordf and I came to a railed platform over-looking the end of the assembly line. Below us, the finished Ordfs were being inspected, fueled and started up to the accompaniment of innumerable *put-put-puts* that drowned out the clangs, crashes and screeches of the plant proper.

In trying to sort out the seeming confusion, I noticed two gray-suited men lurking in the shadows just to one side of the wide doorway through which the new Ordfs were being driven. Both of them had their hats pulled down over their eyes, and one of them held a little notebook in which he was furtively making entries, while the other one held a camera with which he was surreptitiously snapping pictures.

Mr. Ordf caught sight of them almost the same time I did. His face went white. "Get those two!" he shouted to one of his foremen, pointing toward the two men. "They're spies!"

Not one, but six foremen responded, closing in on the two interlopers, carrying wrenches, crowbars, hammers, chains, and whatever else they could grab in a hurry. The interlopers shot out the door, running for their lives, the one with the camera dropping it in his haste to escape.

A narrow steel stairway zigzagged down from the platform to the floor. Mr. Ordf was already pounding down it, shouting instructions to the six


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foremen, who presently disappeared through the doorway. I followed at a more leisurely pace, trying to figure out what in the world was going on. By the time I reached the floor, Mr. Ordf had vanished, and when at last I made my way through the workers and the *put-put-putting* Ordfs he was already returning from the river bank, the six foremen trailing dejectedly behind him.

Presently he joined me in the doorway. He looked crushed. "They got away," he said hoarsely. "They had a boat hidden downstream."

"Who were they, sir?" I asked.

"The Odged brothers. They've been snooping around here for months, copying my techniques and stealing my ideas!"

"Oh. Do they make locomobiles too?"

He looked at me. "Hah!" he said.

I didn't press him for further information. I could see he was too upset. Anyway, the time he'd had to spare for my visit had already run out, and shortly after the unfortunate incident I accompanied him back to the Administrative & Engineering Building, where we shook hands and parted.

I WISH I could tell the reader how Enryh Ordf ultimately made out with the dastardly Odged brothers and whether he succeeded in realizing his dream of turning out Ordfs everybody could afford to buy; but writers as well as industrialists have to apportion their time, and soon after my visit to the Serice River Plant I said good by to Wenda and returned to Earth.

When I got home, my Muse was sitting on the living-room floor, putting a jigsaw puzzle together. "Hi," she said, as casually as though I'd just come from my study down the hall instead of from a planet light years away. "How are things on Alpheratz VI?"

"Fine."

I told her about the bromes, the brome-drawn carriages, the locomobiles and the Serice River Plant, being careful to make no mention of Wenda. (Muses are funny about certain things, and you have to be careful.) "Sounds something like a civilization I know of on Earth 411," she said when I finished.

"Earth II?"

"A planet in a universe next to ours. It's really a rather dreadful place, and I wouldn't advise you to visit it."

"Do they have bromeless carriages there too?"

"No. They have carriageless bromes."

I looked at her. Her elfin face was guileless. Beyond it, through the living-room window, I caught a vista of afternoon hill and the distant footpaths and buildings of the city. "I think you're pulling my leg," I said.

"No I'm not—honest. The people of Earth II had living carriages but no bromes; so they built bromes for the carriages to pull and eventually found a way to make the bromes propel themselves. People are never satisfied with what they already have—don't you know that by this time?"

I looked at her again. "I think I'll go fix supper," I said.

My Muse exaggerates, but she never lies, so if she says there's such a civilization, there must be one. Apparently the only beings in all creation who like to walk are the beings of Earth I; and I sometimes wonder whether we really like to, or are just too lazy to look for a suitable substitute.

—ROBERT F. YOUNG


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCIENCE FICTION BUFFS! FANTASY FANS! DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ENTHUSIASTS! TSR NOW BRINGS YOU...

# METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA

SCIENCE FICTION ROLE-PLAYING GAME

Have you ever encountered a moose with quills? Or a teleporting woodpecker with a double brain and a poison beak? How about a nearly invincible jaguar, complete with the ability to change its body density and emit a sonic shriek, but which fears birds? These are but a small sampling of the mutations which could inhabit the many worlds of METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA.

A vast starship, a virtual world in itself, carrying colonists, livestock, and the flora and fauna of Terra is struck by a cloud of an unknown form of radiation while enroute to a distant star. Chaos reigns when the radiation kills most of the crew, and in the ensuing madness the knowledge of what the ship is and where its destination lies is lost to the survivors -- and there are many survivors. Intelligent mutated animals and plants now populate the vessel, and these compete or perhaps cooperate with the humans aboard.

In METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA, you are aboard the stricken starship and struggling to survive, trying to gain knowledge of the strange devices and mechanical apparatus of the vessel, attempting to learn the secrets of the strange "world" you inhabit. As a player, you may be a human or mutant -- human or otherwise. Your course is up to your skill and imagination.

**METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA** IS A ROLE-PLAYING GAME IN THE GRAND TRADITION OF DUNGEONS & DRAGONS. IF YOU ENJOY THE WORLDS OF MEDIEVAL SWORDS AND SORCERY, YOU WILL LOVE WHAT YOU FIND IN THE FANTASTIC AND FASCINATING WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION.

**$5.00** postpaid

Also available are polyhedra dice for unique random number generation and usable with METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA!

Set of two 20-sided dice for generating numbers 01 through 00 (100) at only $1.50

Set of five dice: one each 4-, 6-, 8-, 12-, and 20-sided for all random numbers $2.50

And to find out the latest on fantasy games subscribe to THE DRAGON - the magazine of Fantasy, Swords & Sorcery and Science Fiction Gaming and Fiction. This bi-monthly publication is printed on glossy paper, with exterior and interior color. THE DRAGON contains the best in articles and stories by top-name gaming and literary authors.

**TSR HOBBIES, INC.**
P. O. BOX 756
LAKE GENEVA, WI 53147

Available at better hobby and book stores everywhere, or order direct

Send check or money order to:

TSR HOBBIES, INC.
P.O.B. 756, Dept. F
Lake Geneva, WI 53147

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ | METAMORPHOSIS ALPHA<br>*Science Fiction Role-Playing Game* | $5.00 |
| ☐ | POLYHEDRA DICE Set of Five | $2.50 |
| ☐ | PERCENTILE DICE Set of Two | $1.50 |
| ☐ | THE DRAGON<br>Six issues of the magazine of fantasy, Swords & Sorcery, and Science Fiction Gaming and Fiction. | $9.00 |
| ☐ | COMPLETE CATALOG<br>Games, rules, miniature figures and accessories for wargaming. Price refundable with first order for $10.00 or more of miniature figures. | $2.00 |

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Overseas: Write for address of local distributor.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Parke Godwin is a friend and collaborator (on a stf trilogy,* The Girdle of Solitude*) with Marvin Kaye (whose "The Flight of the Incredible Umbrella" appeared here last issue), and author in his own right of* Darker Places, *a mystery-suspense novel, and* A Memory of Lions, *a historical novel, both published by Popular Library. In the following novelette Godwin tells a charming story—and one which would not have been out of place in the late and much-lamented* Unknown Worlds*—about a woman who would be—*

# THE LADY OF FINNIGAN'S HEARTH

## PARKE GODWIN

### ILLUSTRATED by STEVE FABIAN

ISOLDE, if you remember her story, was the girl queen of Cornwall in the days of King Arthur, and the sweetheart of a bad luck knight named Tristram.

Though time and legend left their sugary crust, neither these nor any lute-twanging minstrel ever did her justice. She was a joyous, bouncing Irish hellion who died at nineteen, a bundle of brogue and bad manners, all heart and no head; a thoroughly medieval urchin whose first utterance in Glory was that she had been abducted from the world against her will and demanded immediate return. Her claim was not considered.

Isolde was not happy in Heaven. She felt that she just didn't fit in. Some—the women mostly—whispered of her not uneventful past. Others held she was a nice enough little thing if you liked them unpolished. Troubadours protested they would never have put hand to string in her behalf if they had known what she was really like. The immortal Wagner said flatly and to her face she was not worthy of the magnificent opera he had written about her. To most of the romantics she was an artistic embarrassment.

Well, it went this way most of the time. In the beginning, of course, there had been Tristram for company, but that was short-lived. Isolde came to realize that chivalry, while it might beautify a short life (the shorter the better) did not wear well in terms of the eternal. They bored each other until, mutually relieved, they finally went their separate ways.

But Paradise hung heavily upon Isolde, and her harp—an Irish model brought from home—lay discarded and mute. She passed her centuries longing for the good green world below. Such a short life; so little lived,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UMZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so little known. She wanted to go back. At last when the yearning was too strong to keep silent, she planted herself before the Recording Angel and let him know her mind.

"Hear me, Angel: I said it the day I was brought here—against my will and before my time—and I say it again. I want to go *home*!"

"A very peculiar desire," the Angel acknowledged with some disappointment. "I should think you would have had time to let our place grow on you. Very peculiar." He shook his head. "But not impossible; that is, if you can pass the test. Before you can go back you must tell me what is the secret of life."

"And if I know it, I can go back? I can live again?"

The Angel's eyes were old and kind and sad. "You must know it to live at all, child. Where makes no difference."

Isolde pondered this a moment. "Well now, and where might be a good place to look?"

"I don't want to discourage you, child, but if you didn't find it down there, you probably won't find it here. However—" he had said it so often, "look where the heart is."

Isolde went away and thought for a long time, but it seemed hopeless. In her thoughtless lifetime she had never learned the secret of anything. She was doomed to Paradise, as it were, and it galled her more and more as the centuries passed. The virtuous criticized her for what she had been and the snobbish deplored her for what she was. Isolde walked Heaven alone and found no answer to the question. It was as remote from her as Hell itself.

"Well," she decided firmly, picking up her harp, "why not?"

The Recording Angel paused in his eternal occupation and gazed up at the familiar figure. "Yes, girl?"

"I've searched my heart, Angel, and I've looked Heaven high and low and across for the secret. 'Tis not in either place."

"You must know it, nevertheless," the Angel said. "Everyone wants to go back at first. We afford the chance, but we afford it only to those grown wise enough to use a life properly. They are very few and most of them would rather leave well enough alone."

"I never lived to learn what well enough was. An end to this," Isolde raised her hand impatiently. "Open the gates and point me out the south stairway."

The Angel read her intention. "I admire your spirit, girl, but not your reasoning. They can't tell you anything constructive down *there*. I doubt if they'd even want to."

Isolde was not to be swayed. "The gates, Sir!"

"Well, if you're determined—". He opened the portals of Paradise, and she skipped through, turning to wave to him. "I'm glad you're taking the harp with you. You do play well and they never get a chance to hear a really good one."

SHE FOUND the new place better suited to her. The climate was agreeable, the people generally friendly if irresponsible, and there was always something going on. Her coming caused some social stir; she was soon entrenched in the very best circle, a small but powerful clique of Salem women, stoutly traditional and privileged beyond belief.

But Hell, fun as it was, taught her no more than Heaven. Whatever the secret was, she must go *home* to find it, to the world she had left. But



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

how? Her friends were allowed one night on Earth at All Saints' Eve, but she was only a novice. It would be ages before they would trust her with a broom for all of her natural talent. Need sharpened her craft to a fine edge. She evolved her plan and put it to work.

Isolde's closest friend was Prissy O'Gowra, a brilliant Irish witch with the most potent broomstick in the trade. Lately, Prissy's carefree spirit was vexed with a bittersweet sadness—her sudden and hopeless love for the American Secretary of State. He was to appear at an international conference in Paris. When the Prince gave her permission to go there, Prissy was ecstatic. Magic and sabbats were not for her. Their charms were flat beside what loomed in Paris. When begged for the broom, she threw it joyously to the grateful Isolde and whirled away on the west wind, trailing a snatch of *chanson*.

And so, on All Saints' Eve, Isolde flew with her friends to Gallows Hill outside Salem. The night was made for revels—raw, cold and wet with the naked trees bending to the wind against a moonless sky. The Prince himself put in an appearance; there was a quadrille to Isolde's harp accompaniment, and as for spells, their form had never been better. The Washington Senators got another year in the cellar and four gluepots waltzed their way to the Kentucky Derby and a four-way photo finish. It was a glorious night in the finest tradition. When dawn came on dragging a thick fog behind, they sped homeward on the east wind, conscious of a social success.

But Isolde was missing.

It was sorrowfully reported that she had lost control in the fog over the eastern seaboard and was presumed to have crashed. Too late they insisted Isolde was too inexperienced for the flight. Now she was marooned on a world grown callous to the ancient art of witchcraft, but she had the awful O'Gowra broom in her hands and was free to roam till All Saints' next.

For days there was no laughter in Hell. Isolde had been the gayest and dearest of all the brilliant society of the Vivacious Fallen. Now she was gone and with her went some of the sparkle of damnation.

WELL NOW, wasn't it a simple thing to let them think her lost? When she was rid of them, Isolde veered her broom a point or two to starboard and swooped down on the unsuspecting Earth, landing in a small wood. It was early morning still, and the fog coiled in erratic patterns over the ground, seeking refuge in the low places before the sun could drive it away. Isolde listened: not a soul about nor the sound of one, but through the trees the windows of a drab white house stared bleakly at her, just visible above the fog.

"Didn't I always have the luck?" she congratulated herself. "'Tis the castle of some lord, no doubt, and I'm fair in time for breakfast."

It was her first thought to hop the broomstick and *whoosh* up to the house, but it was a grand morning for a walk. She shouldered the broom and in fifteen earthly minutes Isolde found herself in the overgrown front yard of the bald-windowed house.

"What manner of hovel is this?" she wondered. "The paint all peeling and not so much as a candle for light or a fire for warmth. It looked better from afar. An ogre lives here, no doubt—but I'll ask just for surety."

She went up to the mud-splashed


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

door and put her hand on the knob.

"Castle, castle, now will you tell:
Who within your walls doth dwell?"

As one might suppose, there was no answer.

"I'll burn you for kindling, creaking scoundrel!" Isolde hissed, this time in the fairy tongue. "Now open your gawp and tell me who lives here!"

The house groaned, for it had been silent a long time. "Marty Finnigan lives here," it said mournfully. "Alone."

"Sure then, Marty Finnigan keeps a sorry house."

The house sighed deep in its timbers. "No one cares for me," it said with a tremor of self-pity.

"Oh now—and why's that?"

"It's really quite *simple*," said the house peevishly. "Because no one cares for Marty Finnigan."

"Pile o'knotholes, keep your tongue in your head!"

"Well," the house groaned sulkily, "either knock or go away." It settled once more in a manner designed to signify the interview was ended.

Isolde rapped on the door with her broom handle.

Silence.

*Rap! Rap! Rap!* "Halloooo! *Marty Finnigan!*"

Isolde heard muffled sounds from the second floor. Someone was up. She knocked again. "Up with your gate, Sir Finnigan, for 'tis a gentlewoman waits on your stoop in the cold and wet—"

A window rumbled up. The next instant, Isolde was drenched from hair to heels with cold water: "Alright, you gah-damned kids, Halloween's over. Now *blow*!" A touseled head jutted through the window, and Marty Finnigan stared coldly down at the dampened little queen. "Oh . . . I'm sorry, lady. I thought it was those trick-or-treat punks again."

It was Isolde's hot-tempered impulse to singe him roundly with a fireball, but—*noblesse oblige*, and *noblesse* is all the easier when a man's face is no pain to a woman's eye. She gave him a graceful curtsey and asked, "Did I rouse you from slumber, Sir Finnigan?"

Marty rubbed his weekend growth of beard. "Did she wake me up, she says. No," he growled, "I was just lying there with my eyes closed. What's your problem?"

"Problem?"

"What do you want?"

"Just a morsel of bread and a place by your fire."

"A mors—" The Finnigan features contorted in disbelief. "Get lost."

"—So I can wring out the wet welcome you gave me."

"Well," Marty considered it, "I guess that's fair enough." His head disappeared, and she heard him descending the stairs. The door opened. In flannel pajamas and a ratty blue bathrobe, Marty motioned her into his house.

And Isolde moved in. She stood in the middle of the living room and tried on Marty Finnigan's house for size. It was dirty, dark and cold—lonely most of all, with no touch of a woman's hand about it. The logs lay in the fireplace unlit and festooned with trash. The dust of the floor swirled up angrily in protest against the fresh air from the open door. In one corner, a battered coffee table displayed a week's run of coffee cups, a wrinkled necktie, two undershirts, and a pile of bills surmounted by a stale cracker, buttered and forgotten some days since.

"Cushnoo!" Isolde clucked. "What a hog-sty!"

"So excuse it," Marty shrugged,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"it's the maid's day off."

He had been watching her with growing curiosity. She was small—a hair over five feet, no more—and mercurial in her movements. Her hair, impossibly red, was upswept on her head and held precariously in place with two quaint gold stays. He decided quickly that her face was made for laughter, not for looks. Her figure, if she had any, was well hidden beneath what appeared to be Methuselah's nightshirt, bunched in at the waist with the hem trailing behind like the undecided posterior of a hook-and-ladder engine.

Now Marty was many months a grass widower. Since his wife had left, a motley procession of women had left their perfumed trace about his house, but none of them were in the same league with this one for the new and different. Being essentially religious, he concluded that she had been visited upon him as some kind of penance.

"Make yourself comfortable," he mumbled, turning toward the kitchen. He shuffled sleepily out of the room. Her voice seemed to float musically through the separating wall—

"Shall I light your hearth for you? " 'Tis dretful cold."

"No," he grumbled. "The flue's messed up. You couldn't burn gasoline in that thing." He filled the coffee pot with water, chuckling in spite of himself. "Well . . . she *looks* like what I'd get for Halloween, broomstick and all."

The time of year and the thought of the queer old broom summed themselves almost unconciously in his mind. It *was* Halloween, or the day after. Marty grinned: "Oh, come *on*, Finnigan." But the wry smile softened. *Kind of a nice little thing*, he thought. *I wonder where she's from . . .*

Isolde strolled to the fireplace, skirts switching behind her, crooning softly—

"Oh Maeldun, son of Ailill
Came from Aran in Thomond . . . "

She knelt beside the logs, stretched out her hand, then withdrew it, beckoning. "Come, fire: so please you, a little of your best for Marty Finnigan."

And the fire blazed up on Finnigan's hearth.

IF MARTY FINNIGAN had any true genius, it was in the brewing of coffee. Sitting by the fire, they went through two pots with toast and marmalade. Isolde missed her harp; she would have played gladly for her breakfast, but she had dropped it in her wild plunge to Earth. She stirred the fire, humming to herself, and studied the master of Finnigan's Hall. He was taller by a head and a half than her Trist had been, and leaner. His face was still young but life had happened to it. The eyes were shadowed and the frank mouth lined and drawn too taut for its fullness. The thick brown hair was fading here and there to early gray.

*He'd look younger did he smile once a fortnight.*

She liked the way his nose wrinkled up when he lit a cigarette. Suddenly she leaned toward him, fixing him with gray eyes: "Marty Finnigan, 'tis a handsome buck you are. Why is it no woman graces your house?"

There was a strange, far-away quality to her voice. It was inside his head, a song remembered from childhood, calling him down the years to where life could still grow green around the heart. *Stay a little*, he wanted to say . . .


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Marty had been barren soil for the seed of impulse for a long time. He threw his cigarette into the fire. "You *are* an oddball. And you're still soggy from that bath I gave you. Wait, I'll get something you can change into so we can dry out that shroud or whatever it is of yours."

Isolde giggled. "Thank you."

"What's so funny?"

"I just bethought me" she said, "how nice your mouth would be if you let it smile a little now and then."

"You," he said with conviction, "are the *damndest*—"

"Aye," she nodded, taking a piece of toast in three huge bites. As he climbed the stairs, her voice floated after him: "But 'twas not my fault. A tedious long tale it is, and so I'll save it for a winter's night."

Marty returned presently with a faded yellow duster, flapping it vigorously to shake out the wrinkles of long storage. "Here. You're about six sizes smaller than my wife was, but it'll do."

She shrank away from it. "Your . . . wife?"

"What's the matter? She doesn't need it anymore." He dropped it in her lap but she only stared at it.

"You said nought of a wife, Marty."

"Well . . ." Marty made quite an operation out of lighting a cigarette. "She isn't here anymore. We're divorced. Her name is Alice," he concluded irrelevantly.

His glance met hers and was held. "Her name was Alice," Marty heard himself saying, "and all the things I wanted, she didn't. Not even this house. Wants me to move out so we can sell it. Maybe it's a good idea." He looked around the room with new awareness. "God, this place is cruddy."

Fortune brought me here, she thought, and here I'll stay. Plain it is that he needs a woman, and here's as good a place as any to learn what I must learn. If I work my spells right, they won't find me till All Saints' next, and what might I not do for myself *and* this sorry Marty Finnigan before then?

Isolde stood up before the fire, seeming taller than she was. She had once been a queen and the stamp never left her. And as she spoke, the flames leaped in time to the queer movements of her fingers. "Marty, have you never heard that a cricket on the hearth brings marvellous good fortune?"

"In this house," said Marty, "a cricket would die of TB."

"Then I'll be your cricket."

"What—?"

"Let me stay by your hearth and sweep your house with my broom till All Saints' next."

Marty was perplexed. "You know, the dangerous thing about you is you're so believable."

"And, Finnigan," she whispered with mock gravity, "you've grown much too wise to believe in what you see?"

He nodded. "When I found out about Santa Claus." He was vaguely disappointed in her. Only a week before, a dazzling young girl had brightened his threshold for a golden minute till Marty found she had come to sell him a pamphlet on the imminent demise of sinful Mankind. This one, alas, was compounded of the same unstable elements. He threw the door open and pointed to the Great Beyond. "Goodbye, and take your broom with you." He handed it to her. " 'Sweep my house' . . . You couldn't sweep tennis balls with this thing."

"*Oooooh!*"—Isolde was breathless at



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sacrilege. "*That* be too much. Soulless imp, know that on just such a broom, Prissy O'Gowra flew the length and bredth of Eire till it carried her *whoosh*! straight into the cottage of the man who became her husband, it did. Not to *mention*, of course, her many and glorious services regarding the heathen English. Well, it's like crystal you don't know a good broom or a bargain when they be thrust in your *snout*, Sir Finnigan!"

He propelled her toward the door. "Yeah. Sure. Goodbye."

"*Unhand me, ogre!*"

He unhanded her out to the front stoop. "Get lost. Break a leg." *Slam!*

Yet her voice through the heavy door was as clear as though she were beside him: "*Just one leg, Marty?*"

"Fine."

He was on his back with a terrible pain in his left leg. The instrument of disaster lay beside him. He had tripped over that damned broom.

"Broken," Isolde crooned over him. "Fair brast below the knee, but it's a clean break and will mend soon."

"How did you—*yikes, quit pawin' at it*—how did you get in here?"

"Oh," she said airily, "I forgot my broom. But how *fortunate* you are I happened back, for here's yourself with your pin broken and like to be days in the mending by the look of it, with no one but me to get your supper—"

He saw the awful defeat of it. "Oh, no. No . . . no . . . "

"—To mend your socks and tend the fire, and take my old broom to the dreadful dust that's on your hearth and heart, Marty Finnigan. Till next All Saints' Eve!"

ISOLDE stood in the middle of the living room, making little swishing movements with the broom and humming to herself. For the time, at least, she was mistress of Marty's house. Of Heaven, this would suffice her. As for Hell, she had brought fair measure. The sun was well up, and it promised to be a roaring good day.

"In Laighin fair, I met a lad.
Who soon came courting me . . . "

She knelt by the hearth. "Prissy!" she whispered. "*Hoo* Priss, can you hear me?"

The logs crackled furiously for a moment. She listened.

"Oh, I'm grand, Prissy. Thanks for the asking." Isolde took a ball of flame from the fire. Her dexterous fingers kneaded a fiery shamrock as she listened to the small talk of a friend. "Well, if anyone asks, you've not heard one word of me. Promise, now. What? Oh, your old broom's safe with me, and Priss, it still works soo-*per*iorly!"

MARTY ALWAYS SAID it was just magic the way she took that house and made it shine. She took care of him and so well that he put on five pounds before he was out of bed. Now and then he admitted to himself that there *was* something unworldly about her—but then she would bounce into the room and announce with convincing authority that she had just made the grandest stew this side of Hell, and could he spare a drop of the whiskey his dear uncle had sent him—just to bring out the flavor of the meat, of course?

Unworldly? In all his drab, disenchanted days, Marty had never known anything or anyone whose reality was so completely undeniable. She was as real as the luck that came with her; as real as the twenty-pound turkey which she swore on the soul of St. Bridget just traipsed into the kitchen


DIGITIZED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and dropped stone dead—plucked and dressed—on Thanksgiving Day in the morning; as real as the well-paid job that materialized in a formerly uninterested office; as real as the first paycheck which Isolde set in a place of honor on the kitchen table, toasting it with a royal flourish of her teacup: "Increase, little bag of gold." Then with a wink at Marty: "And good health to the master of Finnigan's Hall."

Marty warmed to the tea, the excellent dinner, the cozy sound of logs crackling lustily on the hearth. "And praise them angels as brung it, my grandmother used to say."

She took his hands across the teacups, and her eyes held something not so heavy as sorrow nor light as laughter. "It's no angel I am, Marty." Then erect and determined: "As Mistress Marcianetti will discover, does she not keep her dog from howling and snapping at me when I come near."

"That's Poobah," said Marty. "He's six years older than God. Funny: you're the only one he does that to."

Nevertheless Isolde promised herself that she would inflict the venerable Poobah with fleas enough to make him a Job among canines.

"Mrs. Marcianetti has two interests in life," Marty continued. "Poobah and my welfare. I keep hoping she'll run out of home-canned tomatoes, but she never does. She brings them over about once a week, looks around, shakes her head and leaves."

"Aye, and now you have a housekeeper, and the dear old thing's got a fair crick in her neck from spying out her casement at me."

"Spying?"

"Aye, Marty: wondering who I am, and what I be to you."

He read her trailed meaning. "Well, I've been thinking about that," he started shyly. "I know this is foolish, but—" He stopped; the old fear of being hurt melted his purpose. "What I meant to say was, it's been nice having you here."

She rose and came round the table to him. "No, Marty, say what you started to say. Life's far too short to be afraid of it!"

Marty took refuge in the complicated business of lighting a cigarette. "I don't know. You just walked into this house and sort of put it on like a glove. It lives, it really lives because you're in it. When you leave—"

"When I leave—?"

"If you left, I think the life would go out of it. I think it would fall apart."

"Well, now," her long fingers assured themselves needlessly that her hair was in place, "what a heartwarming concern for your house. And what of yourself?"

Marty blew out a great quantity of smoke. "I guess I go with the house."

Isolde knelt and took his hands. "Listen, Marty: If I knew 'twould all end this night, I'd still say those things you lack the heart to say to me: I love you. You've won me, and your hearth is mine. That's what I'd say, I would."

"Yes," he smiled, and the fear sloughed from him when he looked at her. "And a little more. Marry me and stay here always."

"I will," she whispered, her head in his lap. "I can make you happy, Finnigan."

"I know you can," he laughed, "and when I'm too old for anything else, you can make me respectable."

"Oh, Marty, what a gallant offer . . ."

Suddenly, she twisted away from him. Surprised, Marty saw the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shadow of a frown cross her face, erasing the happiness and leaving something alien in its place. Her head was inclined sharply as if she had caught some sound beyond his hearing: a footstep lighter than thought, or perhaps a voice on the damp December wind. He started to speak but she stopped him with two fingers across his lips.

"Not a sound, Marty. There now: your supper's gone stone cold whilst you gape at me."

Isolde stood up. Resolutely, she reached for the old broom that was rarely out of her sight. "Eat, Marty. I'll not be gone a minute."

"Well, hurry back. If we're getting married, there's buckets of stuff we have to talk about."

"True," she murmured. Straight-backed and firm, she turned away from him.

Out of Marty's sight, her resolution faltered, and she shrank back from the sliding doors that closed off the living room. Beyong the doors, she heard a faint rustle of movement. Isolde clutched at her broom, quailed and retreated a step, the fear a hod of hot bricks on her heart. She took one hesitant step toward the kitchen. Then her head went up; she turned a scornful eye on the panel doors.

*You need not fear the like of him, and you a queen, the proudest Leinster could spawn. Hold tight the broom. Head up. Now, in you go—*

At her touch, the doors slid apart. Isolde took one sweeping step, then halted. The fear dissolved in her throat, welled up and poured out in a peal of relieved, irreverent laughter She fell back against the doors, the helpless victim of her own mirth.

"Oh, God, no!" she gasped, "'Tis himself . . . "

Tall, tragic, and darkly resplendant in the false ermine and sagging black tights of a stock company Hamlet, her visitor helped himself once more to the Finnigan whiskey, threw back his cape and made a sweeping obeisance before his audience of one. "To Her Majestie, Queen of the Faerie Glen," he declaimed in his best third-balcony register, adding a hint of mockery, "greetings from the Joyous Damned."

"Oh my, oh my," she was still giggling. "Expect the worst and get the best. Give ye good evening, Mr. Booth."

The gaunt young man favored her with a brilliant smile. "The same: John Wilkes Booth, your servant. I am come as herald from our court; *nay*—" Booth put up his hand in protest of her single word, "—let not the fear of intrusion mar our meeting. We shall be secret kept, for the time's out of joint, and we are slipped between two broken ticks. That uninspired lout presently absorbing his supper in the scullery will hear no more of us than the wind that brought me."

"Blather, Booth. Spit it out. My supper's cooling while you hold me here."

"The price," Booth smiled, "of materialization. One reacquires old appetites—as witness that rather artless embrace of a moment ago."

"Oooooh!" Isolde's complection darkened a shade. "You be no gentleman, John, or the Prince either, and you can tell him that for me."

"Oh, you wrong us, Isolde. For myself, I wanted you home for our annual festival of the Bard. We do Hamlet again, echoing last year's triumph." Booth gathered the ermine to his ebonied breast, pausing for full effect. "The Prince has again chosen me to interpret the Dane. Wanton nymph, he is a lover and a critic of the arts, a gentleman and sportsman.


GENERATED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

When tidings reached him that you were gone and, through your broom, immune to recall for the nonce, he *smiled* in gracious defeat. Aloud he wished you well and ruled that no unpleasantness attend your holiday."

"Then why are you—?"

"*But*—when he heard that—that *Finnigan* declare his most unpoetic desire, he sent me on the first east wind." Booth smote his temples. "And I in the middle of a rehearsal."

"Sent you to tell me *what*, John? Can you not deliver yourself without suffering so? Tell me what?"

"Say rather to beg, Isolde. Come home now, for come you must, and it will hurt less now then later." Booth moved toward her. "Surrender your broom."

"I'll not!" she snapped, falling back. "Away with you. I'll not return before my time." She swung the broom high, wielding it like a sword. "One step more, John, and I'll sweep eternity clear of you."

Booth halted. "Listen to us, you fool, we know what life is. Madness; blind madness. What was your own time here but misery and heartbreak? What else will you find here now?"

"Life!" she hurled it at him. "Life, you wretched wreck of a soul. Life and its secret, for I left too soon to know what it was. But I'll find it, Booth. You mark me: I'll find it."

"You stole it. You can't steal life, Isolde."

"Then I'll borrow."

"And at what interest?" Booth asked. "You know the Prince never takes a loss. Come home before it is too late."

"Too late?" Isolde lowered the broom. "Tell me, John, why is't I've not been called till now. Why all a-sudden?"

The pale Booth opened his mouth to speak, then stopped. "It is late. I must go. My rehearsal . . ." He swirled the ermine around him with pathetic bravado.

"No!" Isolde demanded. "Tell me why I'm sent for *now*."

"No more . . ." The image of Booth began to blur, each line of the fine, sharp figure dissolving into an amorphous haze until only the magnificent voice remained. "Come home . . . Fairie Queen . . ."

"Back on the wind, Booth," Isolde sobbed, angry and afraid. "Tell it to the Prince, and them Above, if you can: I live! I am! For life's not borrowed, not stolen, but taken free and shaped at will—"

"*Illusion* . . ." came the faint whisper.

"No, 'tis real," she sobbed. "The knowing and the loving of it. Hear me, Booth—"

"*Heartbreak*," said the wind.

The unoiled clock on the mantle roused itself and began to grind away the minutes. Her attention drawn by the sound, Isolde looked at the hands. Even as she watched, they seemed to move faster and faster. But she had found something. *The knowing and the loving of it:* that was something to remember.

To know and to love. That must be the secret.

"Hey, good-lookin'," Marty enticed from the kitchen, "come on! I've poured the wine."

*Was that the secret? Was it?*

"Hey, come on!"

"*Illusion* . . ." murmured the rain, but she did not hear it.

"Aye, Marty," she answered, "I'm coming."

WELL, wasn't she a bride of two days and mistress of her own house, and that house to be put straight this



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Monday morning?

Marty had gone to work. Isolde stood in the middle of the living room and raised her voice: "Wake, House of Finnigan! A word with you."

The house stirred and came alive. The furniture dented and flexed itself as if supporting a body, the curtains rustled, the furnace groaned. Floors and stairs creaked with the memory of a million footsteps, and out of all these came the voice: "What do you want?"

"Obedience," Isolde snapped, "for I am your mistress now, and you'll bend to my wish and the power of my broom. Hold your roof high and gallant, as if you cost twice the gold he paid, and let no one say that Marty Finnigan's a poor man."

"I hear you," sighed the house, "but it won't work."

"And why not?"

"Because it's not real," said the house. "I need love, not spells. There is no love in you and nothing real."

"He knows I love him."

"Words," said the house. "But the belfry told the wind that the candles broke and the Book burned on the altar where you married him."

"And so I can burn you," she threatened, "if your warped temper runs against my wish. *Mind*, you'll do as I say!"

The furnace rattled violently. "I will do as you say," and the voice began to fade, "but it will only seem . . . not be . . . "

"Enough, then," Isolde commanded. "House—be clean.

There was a rush of a great vacuum that swept every particle of dust from the floor, a flapping and rustling as the curtains and rugs shook out their lint, the swish of a hundred invisible brushes and dust rags rubbing and slapping the dust from woodwork, books, and cranny corners. In the kitchen, last night's dishes washed and dried themselves, sailing gracefully from the sink to the cupboard—and the immaculate house was quiet again.

So the happiness began for Marty Finnigan, and the world was green again. He fell asleep at night with the slight form of her curved like a kitten in his arms and woke in the morning to the joy of her nearness. Drawn by the amazement of his love he would lie on his elbow watching her asleep. Most of the time, she lay still as sleep itself but now and then she was restless and tossed fitfully, whispering aloud in some dream. Sometimes she spoke his name or a word in Irish; sometimes strange words that were like far music at the end of night, like the sound of the day itself breaking in their room.

He loved her and the love made him grow, and if everything about her seemed touched with magic, he reasoned it to this love. She had her moods, though, and when they came over her, she wanted to wander alone in the woods and meadows beyond the house. So it was on a Saturday in March that she rose out of sorts from bed and knew the blackness was on her. Without even bothering to take her broom, she kissed him goodbye almost solemnly and went out with a basket to gether herbs for salads and spells.

With herself gone, it was a slow morning for Marty. He drank coffee and read the papers, and toyed with the idea of beginning his flower bed, but gave it up before it became serious. Sprawled comfortably on the sofa, he became only gradually aware of the sound of a car turning into their lane.

His brow furrowed in a puzzled


GENERATED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

frown. He wasn't expecting company, and no one just dropped in on a Saturday morning. The frown deepened to irritation: a salesman—blood brother in Marty's eye to the Japanese Beetle, the termite, and the housefly. He decided to make short, polite work of it.

The woman on the doorstep was tall and coldly beautiful. "Hello, Martin. I see you still resist shaving on weekends."

"Alice, what—"

They stared at each other for a moment.

"Well," she asked finally, "you do have some manners, don't you? Ask me inside."

Marty followed her into the living room where she stood alertly in the center of the floor, head turned slightly to one side. In this attitude, she reminded Marty of a beagle sniffing out a rabbit.

"Sit down, Alice. How about some coffee?"

She made a little grimace of distaste. "Darling it's much too early for coffee. Coffee's for evening and regrets, but I will take a martini."

"Sorry, no gin in the house," he said "We're both whiskey folks here."

Alice laughed drily. "You never did have any taste, Martin. By the way, where's the *new* Mrs. Finnigan. I hear she's quite young."

"Isolde's nineteen," said Marty. "She's out for awhile, but she'll be back soon."

"Isolde?" Alice took a cigarette from her purse and put a lighter to it. "Makes you think of a fat soprano. But nineteen! My God, Martin, what do you talk about . . . when you talk?"

"So what's wrong with nineteen? Am I an antique?"

"Too old for *that*, anyway."

It burned Marty that she could still get to him. He thrust himself off the sofa. "Alright, knock it off, Alice. What do you want?"

"And what has she *done* to this room," Alice ignored him. "With my furniture, too." She was ill at ease in the room. It had a new brightness and charm she could never give it despite her driven search for the Room that was Her. "And that's what I came about," she concluded. "Darling, I *am* in a pinch for money, and since the furniture is mine—now that you're doing so well—I want to sell it."

She pronounced it as if the matter was settled and done; it was her way, the way she'd been from the beginning. Marty felt himself beginning to heat. "Why didn't you do this before, when it didn't matter if there was a rug on the floor or even a floor? Why now?"

"Now just a minute, Darling—"

"And dammit, don't call me 'darling'. You're the only woman in the world who could make 'darling' sound like a common noun."

"For that matter, Darling, the house itself is half mine, legally. I let you stay here because I *was* a little sorry for you. I mean, you're so helpless, Martin. It didn't matter then, but the broker says the value's gone up with the new throughway finished, and I do need the cash." Her expression softened. "I know it's been tough for you, Martin, but it's been no bed of roses for me, either. I work hard, too, and no matter how it turned out for us, give a girl credit, hmm?"

"Oh, I give you credit, Alice," Marty said quietly. Suddenly, he wanted Isolde very much. Now, when he needed her.

*Go make yourself some coffee*, the thought told him, and Marty acted



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without thinking about it. Somehow it seemed a very good idea at the moment. He left Alice so abruptly, she was startled.

"Where are you going, Martin?"

"To make coffee."

"Oh, for God's sake!" She stubbed out her cigarette with a vicious jab and threw her eyes impatiently around the room. A slight sound made her turn.

The sliding doors that led to the kitchen were drawing slowly together.

"Martin? Why did you close the doors?"

There was no answer, nor could she hear him moving in the kitchen. A deep silence had settled over the entire house, and as if a cloud had slid over the sun, the room was growing darker and somehow chilly.

*A storm*, she thought. *I'd better finish this up and leave.* She remembered an appointment for the early afternoon and looked at the clock on the mantle: ten-thirty-three . . .

As she looked, the clock stopped ticking.

"What. . . ?" Alice stepped to the mantle to look at it, and her eye fell on a queer old broom, the handle worn black with use and the head no more than a bundle of birch switches. She picked it up. "Shades of Halloween," she snickered, "how quaint can you be?"

"*Put it down!*"

Alice froze; it was as though the very sound were a pair of hands laid on her will to move. The hands loosened, and she turned. A slight red-haired girl stood behind her with cold grey eyes belying the voice that was softened now to a gentle admonishment.

"Never touch my broom," Isolde took it from her. " 'Tis the luck of Finnigan's Hearth."

Alice felt a tiny chill run like a frightened mouse down her spine. "Oh . . . hello, I didn't hear you come in. You must be Isolde."

"Aye."

"Martin and I have been having a talk." Alice attempted a patronizing grace that fell flat. "I—want to make some arrangement about the furniture and the house. But excuse me, I didn't introduce myself. I'm—"

"I know," said Isolde. "The late Mistress Finnigan."

Alice managed something like a laugh. It was a weak sound.

"Do seat yourself," Isolde invited, "and tell me your pleasure in refreshment."

Alice composed herself and prepared to do battle. She arranged her hands delicately in her lap and crossed her exquisite legs, reassured since Martin's new wife was neither beautiful nor sophisticated. It was true: Martin *must* have gotten her out of some unguarded cradle. "Well, Martin said you didn't have martini makings."

"Oh dear," Isolde laughed. "That be just like a man: not able to find a thing in his own house." She busied herself a moment at the sideboard: "For 'tis here in my hand."

She offered Alice the martini, complete to the olive. Alice blinked. There was nothing on the sideboard but a decanter of whiskey. She tasted the drink and found it superb—but with a something in its tang she couldn't place. "Perfect! Thanks so much. Whatever do you add to get this taste?"

"Herbs," said Isolde.

*Those cold eyes on her; grey, but darker than before . . . like smoke.* With some irritation, Alice found she was becoming increasingly nervous under that gaze. She attempted to


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

avert it. "I think your clock has stopped."

"Aye," said Isolde, without looking at the clock, "it has."

Alice glanced at her watch. "About—well, that's queer. My watch has stopped, too."

"So it has." Isolde's smile was ice. "Time out of joint, Mistress Alice." She took the decanter from the sideboard and sat down facing Alice. "And Marty be asleep in the kitchen, but just for a bit." Her left hand carved a curious shape in the air and held a glass.

Alice gasped. "What on *earth*—!"

"When the clock rouses," Isolde purred, "so will he. Till then, we'll pass a womanly word or two."

She opened the decanter and poured. The glass was a tall one, but the liquor swelled steadily toward the brim, and Alice's jaw dropped proportionately lower as she watched it rise. "Surely, you're not going to *drink* that."

"Oh, yes," Isolde sipped at the whiskey, nodded her pleased approval, and casually drank it down. "'Tis not pure, but only 86 proof."

Alice was shaken beyond manners. "You little fool, that's whiskey! You'll kill yourself."

She tried to rise, but her will and legs had turned to water.

"Drink up, Mistress Alice." The voice was music, but the eyes were black. Alice raised her glass; the round brim held her gaze as it spun, developing in concentric circles, drawing her in . . .

"Now," Isolde began calmly, "as to the selling of the house . . . "

. . . THERE WAS black Limbo, then Alice felt herself grasped by huge hands, and she was dragged up, up over interminable stone steps by two half-naked brutes. The rays from occasional torches glanced off the crude gold ornaments on their arms and gleamed again in their fierce blue eyes. There was no sound in her ears but the wild beating of her own heart as they passed up over hundreds of steps, ending at the entrance of a great hall. At the far end of the hall, raised on a dais, a familiar figure beckoned them forward. Alice was pushed forward to the foot of the dais.

"Kneel," a voice commanded her. "Kneel to Isolde of the blood of Leinster, daughter of a hundred unblemished kings of Eire."

"Please," Alice croaked, "please, God, this isn't real. It's insane." She raised her head to the slight, erect figure on the throne, but flinched again from the searching eyes. "You . . . what have you done to me?"

"Before I judge you," said Isolde, "one small truth out of a lying life to warm my soul upon. For what reason did you bring the pain of yourself to Marty Finnigan? And taking his heart, unworthy as you are, for what reason did you desert him?"

The truth welled out of the bottom of Alice's being. She had no power to silence it, having never known it, and it passed from her heart to her lips like a stranger.

"I was afraid," said the truth in her voice. "I had nothing to give, but I found that Martin needed giving. There was nothing inside . . . "

" . . . AND WHAT a shame it is," Isolde crooned, refilling her glass, "that you come now to talk of selling Finnigan's Hearth that we love so much and our friends, too. But here! I've forgot my graces. Do let me fill your glass like a good hostess." She leaned toward Alice, stretching out


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her open hand. The long fingers closed in a beckoning motion. Alice's glass was full.

Alice rubbed her eyes, shivering with unaccountable cold. She had been sitting and talking, sipping at a delicious drink and listening to a melodious voice that spoke of furniture and trifles. And yet, she seemed to have wandered out of time in a nightmare, forgotten already but leaving its chill on her mind. "What did you say? I'm afraid I . . . it's very strange . . . "

"'*Drink up, Alice.*"

. . . AND ALICE groveled on the stone floor while Isolde's long finger lifted and pointed at her. "It was harm enough to take him, even more to leave. Yea, but to come *now* like a cloud in the middle of his brightest day." She leaned back, musing a moment. At a sign of her hand, a giant shadow loomed beside Alice, ready with the sword. With cold pleasure, Isolde commanded: "Give me her head."

"Don't!" Alice shrieked, cowering away from the shadow. "Please, *don't*—"

The sword came down.

" . . . SO WILL YOU WAKE NOW, and leave this house," Isolde whispered over the sleeping woman. "You will leave us in peace, and only in dreams will you remember the fear of me, nought but the fear—"

There was a sudden *whirr* of clockwork. The sound jarred Isolde, and she spun around. Unbidden by her, the mantle clock was ticking.

"Name of a black day," she breathed, "who is it?"

Alice woke with a violent start. She stared stupidly at her drink as if looking for a reality she might have misplaced. Between her fingers, the glass and drink dissolved to a fine smoke. Then she saw Isolde—and she remembered. She was too frightened to move, but she could scream. She was still screaming when the panel doors banged open and Marty burst into the room.

"What happened?" he looked dazedly at both women. "I must have passed out. I woke up on the floor and—"

Alice bolted out of the chair and cowered against him, her face white and contorted with fear. "Martin, she tried to kill me . . . it was in a dream . . . a man with a sword . . . there was a glass in my hand and it just disappeared . . . "

Isolde backed toward the fireplace in confusion and fright. Something had broken her spell, and now she was caught with her world falling about her head. The fear became a swelling black anger, hammering harder and faster at her temples.

"I don't know what she is," Alice moaned against Marty's shoulder, "but, Martin, she's not *human*!" She clung to him like a child sobbing out of a nightmare to the safety of a grownup, and Marty, with the answering instinct, put his arms around her.

The last stroke of the hammer fell. Isolde gasped with a pain that bent her almost double. Only her will remained: "Take your hands from her, Marty, or I'll burn the wench in your arms!"

Marty looked up at her. For a long second, there was only the loud ticking of the clock and Alice's ragged sobbing. Then Marty pushed Alice toward the door. "Get out, Alice," he said. "Don't come back."

"Come away with me, Martin. Please, for your own sake."


CREATED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But he was already closing the door on her. "No, not with you. This is something between Isolde and me, and you're a stranger, Alice. You always were. Goodbye."

He shut the door and leaned his head against it, eyes shut. From the driveway came the sound of the car started, jerked nervously into gear, and roaring down the lane.

"Marty?"

He didn't answer.

"Marty, will you turn away from me now?"

"Turn away? Turn away from what? You aren't real, are you?"

His voice was quiet and toneless with the knowing. "I know it now. I guess—always—some part of me knew, but I needed someone. Strange—sometimes when I loved you—it was like you weren't there, and I was alone. Not always, no; only a few times when I needed you so much I reached for *something*, I don't know what. Some part of me knew. I guess that's why I never asked how you came."

"From Heaven and Hell," Isolde sighed, "and all the winds between." She was tired, tired as she had not been in fifteen hundred years. "I was searching for life, and 'twas here by your fire I found it. And if I be not your first love, Marty—well you be not mine, either. But that was a long time ago, nor was it half the glory of this."

For the first time, there was something in his expression that escaped her. "Are you afraid, Marty?"

"No," Marty said quietly. "Not afraid." He took a step toward the panel doors.

"Then why do you turn away?"

"Don't you know?" He wheeled on her, and Isolde began to understand the thing behind his eyes and in his voice. It was hurt. "Can't you see what you've done? Alice gave nothing, but she promised nothing. She was what she was. You promised everything when you had nothing to give that was *real*."

"And have you lacked since I came?" she asked, with the strange, sick weariness growing in her. "Have I not won your house for you, once and always?"

"Sure, and for what?" The hurt was a hard brightness in the words. "For the years we'll spend in it?"

"The years? No, we haven't got years . . . "

"For the growing old together—when you'll never grow old, never grow up? For the children we won't have?"

She sank into a chair. "I only had a little time . . . and my broom."

"And you knew that. You knew that, and yet you couldn't know how I'd feel when you—"

"I wanted *life*, Marty!"

"Life!" he screamed at her, lunging at the broom. "With *that*!"

Her hand shut in a fist. "*Don't touch it!*"

She could have cut out her tongue before the wish was half uttered. Marty froze, paralyzed with the sudden agony. It faded slowly, leaving him white and spent.

"Thanks," he said weakly. "That was a quick death."

"God and yourself forgive me, Marty. 'Twas the last hurt I'll ever do you."

"Yes. It's killed . . . " Marty smiled sadly at her. "Oh, my poor, scared Isolde, I couldn't have hurt you. I couldn't, but you wouldn't take the chance."

He walked out of the living room. Isolde heard his footsteps on the stairs, then in the bedroom above,


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the sound of closets and drawers being opened, not in haste but with deliberateness. She rose from the chair and wandered about the living room, unable to think of what might happen. Suddenly she dropped to her knees, a little ball of misery in the middle of the floor.

"Oh, wretched!" she cursed herself, beating futile repentance into the carpet with her fists. "Worthless, white-livered slut! Be you damned twice over for the hurt in his eyes, for the love you took from him, for the life of him you stole, and yourself not fit to kiss his dead, mud-tracking boots."

After a few minutes, Marty came downstairs again, dressed to go out, carrying a small suitcase.

"Where do you go, Marty?"

"Away," he said. "I'll send someone after the rest of my things."

She bowed her head. "And not come back?"

He shook his head. "I don't want to look at this house again. Alice can sell it if she wants, I don't care. But you can work that broom till it wears out; I won't be back."

"No fear, Marty. I said 'twas the last hurt." When she looked at him, the old pride was there but it was gentled. "You've a queen's word for it."

He put his hand on the doorknob, pulled it open. "I guess I just can't take losing again. Goodbye, honey."

"Fare-you-well, Marty. The best of my heart go with you."

The door closed behind him.

Isolde fell forward, burying her face in her arms. "Heaven and Hell, Heaven and Hell, let me die once more."

"How unutterably tragic," said the petulant, cultivated voice behind her. "I really should have brought Booth along. He fairly wallows in this sort of thing."

Isolde raised her head slowly to the well-tailored man in the easy chair, pursing his lips over a tumbler of whiskey. Bitterly and without surprise she said, "Well, now's my day complete."

The Prince sipped at his whiskey, knitting fine brows. "Wonderful stuff! The woman was mad to pass this up for that drowned-olive affair. No—as a matter of fact, I hadn't intended to come myself, only to send again to ask you to come home." He gave her a charming shrug and smile. "But none of your crowd was available. Nero is throwing a party for some American Senator and Booth is still playing Hamlet. Oh! The conceit of that actor! Do you know where he kills the king in the last act? Well, as true as I'm here, whenever the mood strikes him, that unbelievable ham shoots the king with with a pistol and gallops off up center bellowing *Sic Semper Tyrannis*. Still, he's in demand. The women, mostly. As for Prissy, her latest passion is Zen, and she doesn't even care about her broom, though *you've* certainly made free with it." He chuckled with reminiscent delight. "That execution effect was superb. That's why I broke your spell. I wanted to see how well you could manage *a capella*, and, my dear—you fizzled."

Isolde stared at her hands. "What's it matter now? Marty's gone. 'Tis over."

"You can't say you weren't warned. You had every chance."

"Aye, I did." She rose heavily, picked up the broom, and held it out to the Prince. " 'Tis over, let's be gone."

He waved it away. "Not for all the world. No, the moment I saw you, I knew the game was changed. There


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are more interesting considerations now."

Isolde was firm. "Take it. I want no more of this." Another wave of sickness rolled over her. "I said you've won. Must you rack me as well?"

"That's what I meant," said the Prince, "though I must decline the credit. You see, Faerie Queen, you're with child—what a quaint phrase!" He toasted her with his glass. "Congratulations."

"With child . . ." She dropped the broom and sank to her knees, stunned by the wonder of it. "With child! Oh saints, saints, saints, Marty, I have your child!"

"Precisely," the Prince interjected, "and you can hardly blame me for *that*. Nevertheless, you can see why I won't recall you before your time. I will even extend your visit if need be. There'll be the child."

"Marty's child!" she flared. "It belongs to him."

"Of course, Isolde, but you belong to me." An eloquent shrug of his shoulders. "Though it is an unusual case. First of its kind, actually. The possibilities are infinite. For example—how would you like to be mother of a President?" He leaned back, speculating with pleasure. "I'll make him a man of universal insight and intellectual power, a natural leader of men and irresistable to women; yet humble, possessing the common touch. A man of the people. The world will be ready for another Kennedy."

"You'll not have the power of one finger over my son!"

"Oh, stop it!" he snapped. "You're as bad as Booth. He warned you that I never operate at a loss." The Prince picked up her broom. "This is your only hold on the world, and yet its greatest power was only your own lunatic thirst for life. Well, you got everything you wanted. Now, by the same easy method, you want to sweep it all away, and still you don't understand. Not my power but your lack of it will stop you. Yet, with my way, you could have him back."

Isolde was very still for a time, seeming to accept what he said. Finally: "Aye, you do win it all . . . all. You know you can hold me here and that I won't live without Marty. But make me the small promise that Marty and his own will never lack."

The Prince was all graciousness. "They will never lack."

"And my son be happy all the days of his life?"

"Fabulously."

She gave him a cold smile. "Thanks for that."

The Prince nodded benignly. "My pleasure entirely. It's all in the family. So, it's done—now for the last." He held out the broom to her. "Take this and wish your husband back."

She hesitated. "But will he love me?"

"He will want you—not quite the same, but good enough for the time you have left."

"No—not quite the same."

He held out the broom. "But still . . ."

She took the broom. "But still."

"Now, Isolde: wish."

And Isolde wished. "Broom," she commanded, "from the world and the memory of Marty Finnigan, *sweep me out forever*."

The Prince gasped. "Wait!"

"And that done," she raised the broom with both hands, broke it over her knee, and hurled the pieces into the fireplace, "be quit of me!" The two ends flashed into unearthly flame and disintegrated. Isolde sucked in one last breath of sweet air and held



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it, waiting—

A low moan ran through the foundations of the house. The curtains tore loose from every window, the paint and wallpaper peeled, the dust of months swirled in a brown cloud and settled over the furniture and the floor. All that the broom had done for her was undone, for the house had said it would only seem, and the seeming was ended.

But Isolde still stood there—corporeal, uneclipsed. She opened her eyes to the fuming anger of the Prince.

"You treacherous slut. You puling, sentimental, self-sacrificing *cow*!"

Dumbly she waited to be consumed, not hearing or caring. Marty was free of her, and what was done was done.

"Fool!" the Prince screamed at her, his voice almost a ludicrous falsetto with rage. "No one since that primal wench in Eden could have been so stupid. To writhe through the agony of this blind hog-wallow of a world, not once but *twice*. To feel limbs wither and love die—*twice*. To know the death of every dream and its disillusionment—*twice*. And for what grubby little reason? Why do you think that men have clung through all time to the need for Heaven and Hell? Not for punishment, not for reward. They are refuge, both of them, from trying to find a meaning for life; the pointless end to the grisly joke. And it *is* a joke. The immense cosmic joke that you, you second-rate Guinevere, will never understand in a thousand lifetimes. Because in Heaven are all rewards for virtue except the earthly hunger for reward, and if Hell is empty after all, at least it holds no pain. Why shouldn't they be sought after and prayed for by the brave and cowardly alike, the saints and the greedy, the men who knew they walked alone and the petty bargainers who mortgaged their souls to have them loved for five minutes; why shouldn't they be refuge—these two endings that you've tossed out like an old pair of shoes? Neither gives a meaning, but both make an end to *this*!"

Something was dawning on Isolde, something so immense she dared grasp only the littlest piece of it. "Well, take me if you will. Why do you rage so?" She grinned at him. "You've lost your power over me, haven't you, Prince?"

"I wouldn't say that." But he made no move toward her.

"Yes," the thing grew in her, "that's it: the meaning. The Secret. That's why you sent Booth when I was about to give of myself to Marty. Afraid you were that I'd learn the secret and be quit of you." She laughed in his face. "Come, try and take me. Here's my hand, Prince. Try!"

The Prince backed away from the contact. "Now, don't be hasty. Keep away from me. Don't touch me, you grimy little *human*!"

She pursued him around the room, hooting with laughter. "I've won! I'm alive, and if I lay hand or foot to you, by the Grail I'll leave a lump for every inch. *There!*"

"*Yi!*"

"And there! And there! Now, out of my house, for 'tis mine at last! Oh, Marty, Marty," she sank down on the sofa, weeping and laughing with her joy. "I'm alive. I don't know how, but I'm alive."

"Well," said the Prince nastily, keeping a safe distance from her, "at least I don't have the bother of you any more. The broom finishes that."

"'Twas the giving," she said to herself. "The giving."

(cont. on page 122)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Michael Milhaus was lucky. With a letter accusing us of not publishing enough of the "good old fashioned" stories here any more, he sent us a story to show what he meant: "A Personal Demon" (February, 1976). Flushed with success he quickly sent us a second, "In A Pig's Eye" (May, 1976). Then things bogged down. A draft of his third story was not acceptable. Back-and-forth correspondence ensued, during which Milhaus came to realize that "good old fashioned" stories require more than just the desire for them to occur; they demand good old fashioned craft and work—lots of work. Out of that realization comes the New Milhaus: no longer dilettante, but working writer, and a story called—*

# WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

## MICHAEL F. X. MILHAUS

### Illustrated by Steve Fabian

CONSIDER, dear Reader: Life and Death. Good and Evil. Law and Chaos. Black and White. Sex and Oblivion. All the veriest stuff of Life whose churlish churnings and infinite interweavings, confusing comings and linear leavings, constitute the essence of the Universe's febrile fecund fabric.

And all of which, alas, really have very little to do with our tale.

No. Rather, dear Reader, consider ice cream and bitter strawberries, ping pong balls and chalky halls, yin and yang, a cozy college and the frazzled civilization in which it is entombed, magic and boredom, lust and dust, and how the best laid plans of mice and men, both in and out of Academia, gang aft agley.

Anathae and Professor Willis Baxter, dear Reader—consider them, for they are our protagonists. First, Anathae.

Where does one begin a suitable description of this cuddly vixen, this seeming Lolita of Powhattan University who has made Willis Baxter appear her humble Humbert and made him love it? How shall we outline her to you as she stands, at the beginning of this our third saga, in the good Professor's office? Shall we call attention to the flame of tawny red hair which covers her head, framing the storybook beauty of her apparently teenage face, and licks down her classically formed shoulders to end just even with her 18-inch waist? Shall we point out other aspects of her lithesome figure, poking out and in, and curving provacatively and cathartically under the dreamy creamy silk of her dress—surely a prototype of pubescent perfection? Shall we alliterate until we are illiterate, pulse and pound with our prose, purple with



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

our passion over her full lips, full hips, her sparkling eyes and sparkling teeth, her short dress and that which lies beneath?

No again. Rather, let us catch our breath, contain our emotion and explain that this little "teenaged" lady is half-demon, half-human, and older than she looks. Rip off that short silky dress she wears there in Willis Baxter's university office and you will find a cute, very expressive tail curling out from the base of her spine; take off her gleaming calf-high boots and you'll see curly hair leading down to genuine Satan-patented cloven hooves; push back the bangs of her fire-engine hair and you'll note two pert little horns.

Yet take warning, dear Reader, if you are at all literal minded—for rip off her dress, take off her boots, push back her hair without her expressed permission and chances are, unless your name is Willis Baxter, that you'll end up bare-bottomed at the South Pole before you can twist the curls of your moustache and say, "Ah, me proud beauty!"

Enough of Anathae for now, and on to Willis Baxter.

You may think you've seen his type before. The Rumpled Young University Professor With Chalk Dust on His Hands. The Absent-Minded Bumbling Bookish Boob. Or, in a word, a klutz.

But scratch the stereotype and find, beneath, the man. As he sits before us now in his new position as chairman of the Arts and Sciences Division of old Powhattan University, let us remember that it was this seemingly meek man who precipitated these adventures by performing a drunken invocation at a party which brought the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nubile Anathae to our attention.[1] Let us also not forget to recall, dear Reader, that as we closed our last exciting tale—in which we detailed how the Governor of the Commonwealth was transformed into a prime candidate for the bacon factory—the supposedly meek Willis Baxter, for the sake of his beloved Anathae, unflinchingly faced The Dark One Himself.[2]

So, although he may yet be a bit of a bumbler, something of a bookish boob, and still a klutz much too humanly prone to err, let us keep sight of the fact that he is learning something of the verities of Life (about which, our first paragraph)—for he is, above all, a man of good intentions.

"I WON'T DO IT." Anathae said flatly, her delicate hands on her hips.

"What do you mean, you 'won't' do it? A few weeks ago it was, 'Anything for you, Will.' What's different now?" Willis clamped down his teeth so that his jaw muscles twitched to show his exasperation—a trick which had served him well in the classroom—and rose from his seat, dislodging a sheaf of papers which fluttered to the worn yellow carpet of his office and were ignored.

1. "A Personal Demon", FANTASTIC, Feb., 1976.

2. "In A Pig's Eye", FANTASTIC, May, 1976. (Incidentally, dear Reader, if through some saddening set of circumstances too harrowing to be detailed in this brief aside, you unaccountably failed to buy and read lovingly both of these splendid issues, take heart! Copies are still available, @ $1 the copy, from Mr. Sol Cohen, the publisher, at the address indicated on the contents page. Buy five or six copies! Be the first on your block! Do it now! Act without thinking!)

"Nothing's changed, Will. It's just—"

"You're a demon brought here by my magic," Willis interrupted. "You're supposed to do whatever I ask. Aren't you?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Let's just say, then, that I don't *want* to do it—that the demon part of me must do as you say, but the human part is asking you not to demand *that*."

Willis's features softened visibly. "Oh," he said. "Well, I think I can understand that." He crossed the office to her and took her in his arms. "But Ana, dearest, don't you realize that regardless of how beautiful your magic makes Gertrude it couldn't possibly dim my affections for you?"

"That's not what I meant."

"Then," he said, "I guess I *don't* understand." He let his arms drop to his sides. "Or maybe I do. Maybe it's really the demon in you that doesn't really want to do it—because it would be the charitable thing to do."

Anathae's green eyes—eyes with which Willis had not yet come to terms—narrowed. Her eyes were ageless, like the land of Egypt from which she had been taken thousands of years before as a demon into Hell.

She said, "Is that what you think? Is that *really* what you think?"

"I don't know," he said, backing away. He realized that she was growing angry but did not know her well enough yet to seek a graceful retreat. "It certainly seems . . . Well, suppose you tell me."

"Because it isn't charity, Willis Baxter. And who the Hell are you to give Gertrude your charity, even if it was that? But it isn't—it's guilt. You let her keep you under her thumb for a number of years, then dumped her when I came into your life, so now



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you want to 'make it up'—as if *you* had *anything* to make up to *her*—by having me make her beautiful."

"Just a damned minute," Willis said. "Maybe you're right—maybe it is guilt. I've been a dumping spot for guilt all my life. My parents wanted my brothers and sisters to grow up healthy and guilt-free, so they dumped it all on me. The very words 'judge' and 'jury' used to make me cringe with paranoia. Whenever I heard about horrible crimes in my neighborhood, I used to wonder if maybe I'd committed them in my sleep. But so what? The fact is, Ana, that Gertrude was the closest thing I'd ever had to a girlfriend, until you came along. I 'dumped' her, as you put it, and I do feel bad about that. So maybe I've decided that the least I can do, the *very least*, is to have you use some of your magic powers to help her get another man. What's so terrible about that?"

Anathae let out a sigh of exasperation. "You really don't know, do you? No, I guess you don't. Will, you know where I come from, don't you?"

"Certainly," he said. "Egypt."

"No," she said. "I mean the other place."

"Oh. You mean the Other Place. Hell."

"That's right. And do you know what they say the road to that place is paved with?"

Willis smiled. "Good intentions, I've heard. But I've got to meet your parents sometime—and on the way down I can tell my fellow travelers that I helped provide some of the road's building materials."

Anathae stamped her hoof. "Very funny, Willis. Don't you see that while your intentions are good, your motives are base? You just want to salve your conscience. But if you'd just stop to ask yourself why your conscience is bothering you, and whether or not you should feel that way, and consider the consequences of—"

"I've done that already," Willis interrupted. "I don't care to do any more. As for 'consequences'—aside from the fact that you'll have a little competition for the whistles and stares of the underclassmen—I fail to see how making Gertrude look beautiful could harm anyone. And I'm sure it would do her a world of good. I'm beginning to think that if you weren't so jealous—"

"Huh! Jealous? Me, jealous? Of Gertrude? Now that's the last straw!"

"What else am I to think? You certainly have no competition—so long as Gertrude looks like Gertrude. But what if she looked better, eh? What if she looked like a combination of Marilyn Monroe and Raquel Welch, eh? Yes, Anathae, I think I'm really beginning to understand things a little better now."

Anathae stood for a moment in sulky silence. She knew Willis was goading her deliberately, but seemed unable to resist being goaded. She took a deep breath and tried to speak calmly. "It's not right," she said, "to mess with Mother Nature."

"Hah!" Willis retorted. "You're a fine one to talk about messing with nature, after turning Governor Asque into a pig and Larry Hawthorne into a slug!"

"I changed them back," the girl-demon said defensively.

"Only because I insisted. And poor Larry still can't say so much as 'God damn it' without putting his finger on his head and singing something from


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Madam Butterfly*."[3] Although he was trying to use it as a point against her in the argument, Willis could not help but smile at the thought and add, "It wouldn't be so bad if only he didn't try to sing the soprano parts."

"All right, Willis, have it your way. I've tried to warn you. I'll do what you want."

Willis took her in his arms again. "You'll change Gertrude?"

Anathae nodded. "I'll do it slowly, carefully, over a period of a week or so, so it won't look like magic. A little here, a little there, looking better every day, until it all falls into place. That what you want?"

"Yes. I knew you'd do it."

"Just one thing," Anathae said ominously.

"Oh?"

"No matter what happens, no matter what the consequences, I want your solemn oath that you won't ask me to use my magic to help her—or you, in this circumstance—again. Do you understand? Once I've changed Gertrude, that's it."

"All right," he replied. "I think I can understand that. You have my solemn oath."

"Very well."

Anathae made a few circling gestures in the direction of the front office, said something that sounded to Willis like "Whoop-de-doo" (but indistinctly, despite being right there in his arms), then said, "It's begun—nothing can stop it now."

Willis kissed her warmly; she returned his kiss with a peck on the cheek. And before she vanished, she said, "Remember Epimethius? He couldn't return a gift once he took it. This kind of deal works the same way. I hope, when the time comes, you'll recall that I gave you previous warning."

NOW, DEAR READER, as painful as it might be, let us consider Gertrude Twill, Department Secretary, "jilted girlfriend" of Professor Willis Baxter.

Much time would be saved by going back to read the description of Anathae at the beginning of this tale and pondering its opposite number. Suffice it to say that looking at Gertrude, from the tip of her mud-colored hair to her tennis shoe-clad feet, demonstrated to most who cared to bother that it wasn't worth bothering to look at Gertrude.

It was true that her teeth, clad in braces, had made kissing reminiscent to Willis of the Spanish Inquisition. It was true that she had often been voted by students and faculty alike as Most Likely to be Traded to the Green Bay Packers. It is true that while she had been Willis's girlfriend, the combination of his shyness and her attitudes had forced intimate caressing to stop upon reaching the elbows. It was true that she had maintained her hold on Willis through most of their relationship by harassment and intimidation. It was even true that while no one had ever used the words "cute" or "cuddley" to describe her, it was equally true that—in her present form—no one would ever want to.

And yet, what of that?

Which of us, dear Reader, are such

3. How much less a mystery this would be to you, Oh Reader, had you but read the previous tale! Suffice it to say that in changing Larry Hawthorne back to human form, Anathae made it so that this malady would befall him should he ever again attempt magic in any form. This unfortunately (for Larry Hawthorne) included simple, everyday curses such as "God damn it" or "Go to Hell!"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Adonises or Venuses that we can laugh at physical ugliness? Which of us has such a perfect personality that we cannot overlook another's faults? What sheltered individual among us has never known a beautiful woman or handsome man so twisted by their beauty that one would gladly trade their company for that of Quasimoto without a qualm? And who of any sensitivity has never seen true beauty in a form that offers no physical competition to the *Playboy* and *Playgirl* pinups?

Eh? Eh?

Think about that, dear Reader. And at the same time, ponder one other question while keeping in mind that it is one which has been taken up (without resolution) by the Great Thinkers since there have been Great Thinkers: What is beauty?

It was Day Three. If Gertrude Twill had noticed a certain firming of her legs, stomach and breasts, an added luster to her hair, a softening of her facial features—and attendant attention from males around her—it was nothing she couldn't explain. Years of mental discipline—always getting to sleep and rising at an early hour, attuning herself to office routine—combined with plenty of exercise, and liberal amounts of brocolli soup, were finally beginning to pay off.

It was Day Three, a little before her usual rising hour, and the phone was ringing.

She pulled the covers off herself, noting as she did so that her nails were beginning to curve and taper, although she'd never had a manicure in her life. Walking with a grace that had been denied her ere now, she reached the phone and picked it up.

"Hello?"

"Uh, hello, Miss Twill?" The voice was feminine, unfamiliar.

"Yes."

"I'm sorry to disturb you so early, Miss Twill. I'm Miss Townley, Dr. Henderson's assistant."

Gertrude was still not quite awake, but she recognized the name of her dentist. "Yes?"

"Well, uh," Miss Townley said, "I don't quite know how to tell you this. You recall, about eight years ago, you came to us from Dr. Isakmov after he died?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, it seems Dr. Isakmov kept his records in a rather strange way. He indicated that your braces were to be removed—in fact, he indicated that they *had* been removed. We had some temporary help in the office yesterday, and one of the girls we brought in used to work for Dr. Isakmov. She noticed, in going over your file, that he'd removed the braces two days after he'd died."

"But that's impossible," Gertrude said. "And besides, he never did. Remove them, that is."

"We know that now," Miss Townley said. "She told us—Miss Rolfe, that is, the one who used to work for Dr. Isakmov—that sometimes the doctor made notations in advance. As apparently he did in your case. I asked Dr. Henderson about this, and he said he was certain he'd told either me or one of the other girls to note that your braces should be removed, among his other instructions to us. Apparently, though, every time you came in, someone checked your file and found from that that your braces had already been removed, so they deleted the note."

Neither Gertrude nor Miss Townley, at this point, knew quite what to say after that; there was a full moment of silence. Finally Miss


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Townley spoke: "If you have the time, I could squeeze you in at 10:30 tomorrow. Under the circumstances, considering that this is a terribly embarrassing mistake, there will be no charge."

"What? Oh. All right. Tomorrow at 10:30."

Gertrude put the phone back on the hook, eyed the alarm clock which was within a few moments of going off and shrugged.

She had a little difficulty getting dressed. Her pants suit was baggy in some places, too tight in others. She had been noticing that, and telling herself that she would have to dip into her savings to buy new clothes if the trend continued. The trend, evidently, was continuing.

DAY FOUR.

"Startin' rather early, aren't ya, Doc?" asked Mike Schultz, the bartender at O'Leary's Bar & Restaurant.

Dr. Henderson nodded in acknowledgement. "But I need it, today," he said.

"Well," Mike said as he started on the doctor's daiquiri, "I ain't here to knock the business. What's the problem?"

The doctor let out a sigh, as if by preparing to talk about it a great weight were dropping from him. "I think I'm flipping out. Losing my hold on reality."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. Mike, I see ten, maybe twelve people a day—but I've still got, no, I *used* to have a pretty good memory for faces. I had this lady patient today, though. As I remember it, I used to have to remind myself that she was a secretary down at the University, not a truck driver."

Mike poured the doctor's daiquiri. The dentist picked it up and took a long draught before he continued. "Only I was wrong. I mean, yeah, I had the face right, the person right—but Christ, she was gorgeous! No, not gorgeous—beautiful. Skin like peaches and cream, a figure you wouldn't believe—like a goddamned starlet!"

Mike just nodded.

"You've seen my wife, haven't you, Mike? We've eaten here a few times together. We've been married six years; I still think she's lovely. We have no problems—I love her, sex is just great, I couldn't be happier; I've never cheated on her. Oh yeah, sure, I can appreciate a good looking woman as easily as the next man—but I'm quite happy with what I've got and don't want to mess it up. *Didn't* want to mess it up. But Mike, it was all I could do to keep my hands off this lady.

"Let me have another, will you?

"Well, fortunately I couldn't talk to her. I guess it was fortunate. I tried to make small talk, but all I could say was 'Uhhh', and 'Ahhh' and meaningless nonsense like that. I cut myself six times, taking her braces out, I was so nervous. Luckily I'm the only one who got hurt.

"And that's a funny thing, too. I took off her braces and her teeth were perfect. I mean, I knew the office records were screwed up or she'd have had her braces off long ago, but there wasn't anything wrong with her teeth—not anything. Now, as I said, I remember her, even if my memory is incorrect. I've worked on her before. But nothing's there—no fillings, nothing. I dunno."

Mike wiped the bar as the doctor took a sip from his second drink. "Lucky for you," he said. "I mean, that way, you won't be seeing her again."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm afraid that's not the case, Mike," Dr. Henderson said. "I've made appointments—one a week for the next year—to clean her teeth, free of charge. I really think I'm flipping out."

**D**AY SEVEN.

It was a short walk from Willis Baxter's red-brick apartment complex to the icy sidewalks of Powhattan U. He had been working very hard with the Finance Office over at North Administration. In his zeal he'd met with every official affecting monies to A&S, arranging appointments from early morning until late in the evening each day since he'd extracted the promise from Anathae. And as a result he had not seen Gertrude in the interim. But today, he decided, he was going to see his handiwork. Willis smiled at everyone he met—even long-haired boys, at whom habitually he had thrown reproving stares.

*The world is changing*, he thought as he admired the graceful snow-covered firs that lined the walk. Everything was new and beautiful, and life was worth living.

At last he attained the creaking doors of the snowy-pillared Administration Building and marched down the tiled hallway. He paused momentarily before the reinforced oak doors of the Department of Arts and Sciences and tried to peer through the wired glass, but the view inside was obstructed by peeling gold letters which stated boldly *Dean and Department Heads—A & S*. He pushed open the door, having steeled himself, and walked in.

It hit him in the stomach—a seemingly invisible pile driver.

"Uhhh," he said.

Gertrude Twill, beautiful from the tip of her dainty toes to the top of her rich brown wavy hair, seemed to broadcast sensual sexuality with the slightest of her movements. She looked up.

"Professor Baxter," she said, acknowledging his presence.

"Ahhh," he said, nodding.

She smiled, her teeth a flash of even sparkling whiteness.

"The dentist took them off this week," Gertrude said, tilting her head provacatively. "As I was sitting there getting my mouth in shape for the first time in years, it suddenly occurred to me that I should sue the bastard. But I think I'll let him clean my teeth free for a while." She laughed. "I feel great."

"Uhhh," Willis said, again nodding dumbly, his retinas suffering severe overload as he noted the new strain at the front of her new lacy white blouse, and the smooth sweep of her legs as she turned in her swivel chair. Finally, finding his voice, he whispered hoarsely, "You *look* great."

Gertrude's smile twisted, merged between sarcasm and a sneer. "Not as great, I'm sure, as a teeny-bopper. But thanks." She turned back to her littered desk, ignoring Willis completely.

Now that she was turned away from him, he was only mildly disturbed by her supple back and the rippling waves of her hair, and not by her wide, liquid eyes with their heavy, sultry lashes or her moist red lips. "Ahhh," he said, "I guess I'll be going. I have, uhhh, lots of work to do."

"I'm sure you do." Gertrude sniffed without turning back to him. She began slicing open the morning mail with a letter opener—it occurred to Willis that she would have done as well with her long, red nails—and sorting it into piles.

At last Willis tore his eyes away



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and lumbered past her down the hall toward his office.

It was a long and lonely morning for Willis. He shuffled through the routine reports that had accumulated, and he read and approved the new curricula for Physics and French Language, although he did not feel qualified to make the decision.

Noon passed on leaden feet. He shuffled papers, skimmed reports. There was the usual afternoon slump at three o'clock. Then, what seemed subjectively several hours later, four o'clock arrived.

Willis packed his briefcase and was striding down the hall toward Gertrude's office by 4:10. He did not hurry, since although he was hoping she had not left for the day (he knew she often stayed until six or six-thirty to finish up) he still was not certain what he would say. For some reason, "Ahhh" and "Uhhh" seemed to have been used overmuch.

Willis found as he approached her office that while coherant thoughts about what he might say to her diminished, the pace of his steps nonetheless increased.

When he stepped out of the hallway onto the plush green rug that decorated her office outside the Dean's, his heart leaped and his brains seemed to scramble as he looked in the direction of Gertrude's desk.

There she was, a vision of long-legged slinkiness, her black skirt clinging to her like nylon pulled from an electric dryer and her blouse seeming to have become so small that the top four buttons had to be undone to allow room.

And on her desk sat his old arch-rival, Professor Larry Hawthorne.

"Baxter!" Hawthorne jumped up somewhat furtively. "So how's the job?"

Willis looked from Hawthorne to Gertrude, then with difficulty back to Hawthorne again. He pondered Hawthorne's furtive jump when he'd entered and wondered if the two of them had perhaps been talking about him.

*Stop it*, Willis, he told himself. *That way lies paranoia.*

"Uhhh," Willis said, "fine. What're you doing these days?"

Hawthorne threw back his long black hair with a flick of his head and pulled himself up to his six feet, two inches. "I assumed you knew. I'm back on the staff, Baxter. My curriculum reports are probably on your desk right now—Survey of Renaissance Lit."

"Yes," Willis said, nodding, mentally checking the clutter on his desk and sifting the course outlines he'd reviewed that day. "Of course, Larry. I'm, uh, glad to have you back on the staff."

"I'm grateful," Hawthorne said without sounding so, "that that lady friend of yours refused to press charges."

"It was a complete misunderstanding, and an unfortunate one," Willis said. "Anyway, you have a lot to contribute."

"Indeed he does," Gertrude said, standing up. Her hand traced Hawthorne's sleeve and came to rest at the nape of his neck. "You'd be surprised at the innovations Larry could have implemented, if he'd been—" She bit her ruby lip with concern, having said more than she'd intended.

Although Willis was beginning to sense a menace from the pair, it was all he could do to keep from replying with another "Ahhh" or "Uhhh", and say instead, "If he'd been appointed chairman instead of me?"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No hard feelings," Hawthorne said quickly. He put an arm around Gertrude, his hand coming to rest just underneath her left breast, and smiled. "You win some—you lose some."

"That's true," Gertrude said sardonically. "Even *you* lose sometimes, Willis." She moved closer yet to Hawthorne.

"Uhhh," Willis said. He blushed. "It's late," he said, making a show of checking his watch although it was not late at all. "See you all later," he said with false cheer.

As he walked down the steps to the winding pathways of Powhattan U, Willis Baxter's thoughts were ajangle. He tried not to think paranoid thoughts. *Stop thinking paranoid thoughts, Willis Baxter!* he told himself.

He began to understand, too late, Anathae's warning. Like Epimethius, who wed Pandora and accepted a nonreturnable gift, there seemed little he could do but await whatever hand Fate dealt him, having given Fate a free wild card.

THAT FRIDAY, the following memo appeared on Willis's desk:

TO: *Willis Baxter, Chairman, A&S Div.*
FR: *Cromwell Smith, Dean*
RE: *Duties of A&S Chairman*
*It has been brought to my attention that the spectrum of duties ascribed to the chairman of Arts & Sciences requires a broad understanding of each division. Therefore please submit to me, no later than Feb. 15, a detailed analysis of each division and suggested changes, if any.*
CS:*gt*

Willis let the memo fall from his fingers onto the desk and sat in his chair for a long time staring out the open door of his office. The hollow echo of distant footfalls brought him back to himself.

It was a simple enough matter, he decided; he could easily request reports from all divisions and then compile the data. But why? Why had this "understanding" of the job been brought to the Dean's attention? And why had Smith seen fit to add that little fact to the memo? Was there perhaps some implied threat here? Or had there been a complaint from some source considered unimpeachable?

Or was he just being paranoid again?

He noted that Gertrude had typed the memo, but knew there was nothing unusual about that. Gertrude did most of the Dean's typing, as well as his own and a few others', when she was not overseeing the work of the other women in the office. Indeed, there was nothing of importance to be noted here, other than the fact that Gertrude was a superlative secretary.

Willis took up a Bic and a yellow pad and started drafting a letter to all divisions. But it was hard to concentrate; someone was laughing out in the hall, and the echo multiplied the sound disproportionately.

He muttered a "Dammit," threw down his pen and walked across the worn yellow rug to the door to admonish whoever it was who was laughing.

But as he reached the doorway he saw the new Gertrude Twill—dressed in a clinging orange dress much too short for February—with her arms wrapped tightly around Dean Cromwell Smith!

Willis drew his head back quickly, his breath quick and shallow, and eased the door closed.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Could he believe what he'd just seen?

Had Dean Smith's hands really been where they had appeared to have been?

Willis staggered back to his chair and dropped down; he sat there a long time staring at his hands. He kept hearing that laughter long after it had disappeared behind his, and yet another door; the sound of it hung in the air like an obscenity uttered during the Mass.

He knew he had delivered a powerful weapon into the hands of his enemies. And that only Anathae—promise or no promise—could help him.

"I TOLD YOU!" Anathae said, flinging herself down onto the couch. "You gave her the ability to do something she's wanted to do all along—she's been through a lot of humiliation. It would have been one thing, Willis, if she'd had any beauty *inside*; but enough 'I-told-you-sos'."

Anathae rolled over onto her stomach and peered over the arm of the couch at him. Willis sat slumped in his worn purple easy chair, his face creased into a frown and staring at some unresolved point on the wall beyond her.

"Now I know how vindictive and shallow Gertrude really is," he said.

"Come now," Anathae said. "You wouldn't be saying that if she'd fallen into your arms after I'd completely fulfilled your wish."

Willis bristled and then slumped back down again. "Yeah, I guess you're right. I mean, I did sort of go off that day with the idea running around in my head that she'd be grateful for what I'd done."

"Even without having been told that you were responsible," Anathae said.

"Right. Crazy, wasn't it? And you did make her, uh, quite beautiful, phyiscally."

Anathae rose from the couch and put her soft hand on Willis's cheek. "I don't mind if you desire other women, Willis. It's completely normal. If you want, in fact—"

Willis waved a distracted hand at her. "No. I'm glad you're not seriously annoyed. If anything, I'm more annoyed at me on that account than you are. But where you can help me," and here Willis paused, took a deep breath, let it out, then continued, "where you can help me is by changing her back the way she was. If she loses all that beauty, I'll be safe. Maybe you could fix it so she lost her job."

"Now I *am* disappointed in you."

He had expected this reaction from her and had tried to steel himself against letting it affect him. The steel melted; he felt dismal, but by virtue of feeling so low he was able to force himself to go on. "If there were any other way, Anathae, I wouldn't demand this of you. But I don't know what they're planning, just that they're almost certain to trip me up. I need a weapon, and that weapon unfortunately is you."

" 'Demand'? Did you say 'demand'?"

"Yes, Anathae, I did. I know that I'm breaking my solemn promise to you, but I don't see any other way out."

"No, I won't do it. I refuse to help you. N-o. no. No help."

"Then I'll have to send you back to you-know-where." The moment he said it, he wished he could take it back. But she had, he reminded himself, told him early in their relationship that what he lacked was forceful-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness.

She didn't say anything for a while. She stood in front of him, searching his eyes; her eyes, for once, almost looked her age. "If you could do that," she said, "then I don't think I could miss you."

"You realize, of course, that if anyone has come across your name—quite likely, since Wilhelm's book has been out for well over a year now—and tried to summon you, that they've failed and therefore had to consign you to Hell forever. If I send you back, you'll probably never see Earth again."

"That could be a blessing in disguise, Professor Willis Baxter."

"Is that your answer?" he asked. "I guess it is. All right, I mean what I say."

Willis got up and went to a closet; pulling a piece of chalk from a coat hung there, he turned and drew a pentagram on the rug.

"Your place," he said pointing, "is over there."

She took her place in the center of the pentagram. "I'm ready," she said.

Willis swallowed hard. A girl, a woman, who loved you was supposed to do what you wanted, wasn't she? If she didn't you should be a little forceful. A woman's place was to yield, wasn't it?

"*Ubele* . . ." he began to chant.

She closed her eyes.

He went on, ". . . *Canet Minen* . . ."

Willis remembered how he'd sent her back, once before, and how lucky he considered himself on having been able to summon her up again. But dammit, why did he feel like such a louse?

". . . *Teryae* . . ." he continued.

She'd been in tears the last time, protesting that she loved him. Where were the tears now? Why did everything he do feel like the wrong thing?

"*Exconae chanet!*"

If she didn't believe he'd really do it—well, he was coming to the end of the chant now. Let her speak or forever . . .

". . . *Isnel* . . ."

Dammit! She knew the words as well as he did. One more word from him and she'd be back in Hell, probably permanently. Well, why didn't she speak? If that's what she wanted, if eternity in Hell was what she really wanted, why then by God, he'd . . . he'd . . . he'd . . . The guilt sent a cold sweat frosting over his back and chest, and his shirt hung clammy against his skin.

Very gently, Willis pushed Anathae out of the center of the pentagram. Once again, he swallowed hard, then erased the pentagram very carefully with his foot.

"You knew I couldn't do it," he said. "You knew it all along."

"No, Willis," she said, "I didn't. I'm very glad you find that you can't, just as I couldn't do anything willfully to hurt you. But I didn't know it in advance, until you proved it just now. I hoped you wouldn't but if you didn't feel that way, I'd have been better off in Hell."

Willis walked slowly back to his chair, nodding to himself, and sat down. "I understand, now, why you didn't want to make the change in Gertrude in the first place. But maybe you'll tell me, since I can't figure it out, why you extracted that promise from me, why you're so insistant on holding me to it."

"Because the answer to your problem, Willis, is in you, and in them—in your power, and in theirs. In your beauty, if you will, and in theirs. Do


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you understand?"

"No," Willis said, "but I'll think about it."

Anathae sat down opposite him on the couch and pulled at the green dress she wore; she still had not grown used to wearing clothes. "Will, look at me."

Willis looked into her eyes; those deep green eyes into which he had tried so often not to look directly; the disturbing quality about that icy green which usually made him shiver was not in them now.

"I'm four thousand years old," she said, her voice seeming to echo inside his head. "I've known many people in this world and the other, and few of them possess the power. Gertrude, for instance—she has it. She's an excellent secretary—a credit to the University. She may be shallow, petty; she's not grown up with her physical beauty, and she's trying to use it in a despicable way against you because of the hurt you gave her. These are not good things, but don't confuse not being good with being evil. I have known evil, Will."

"And Hawthorne?" Willis asked. "I suppose he's a credit too? Maybe he should have gotten my appointment; is that what you're thinking?"

"He's not much of a person, Will, as a person," she answered. "He's vain, ignoble, greedy, loud and a bore. But I've spent some time checking, and he has his own beauty. Besides being a good professor of Renaissance Literature, he spends every free moment studying the psychology of motivation; learning is his life, and for all his personal defects, he can't help but want to inspire others. He may bore the socks off elephants when he tries to be the life of the party, but he doesn't bore his students. He's the best student counselor in his division, and you know it.

"And what about you, Will? You've got more character in your little finger than the both of them together. You'd step aside if you thought Hawthorne—or anyone else, for that matter—could handle this job any better than you. And for all you're asking my opinion just now, you know that you're the only one really capable of handling the whole picture, and it's your opinion of yourself that really matters. Your ideas about education have scope—the kind that's needed if Powhattan isn't going to turn into a diploma mill, the kind that no one at the University has, not Cromwell Smith, not Larry Hawthorne; not Gertrude Twill. And you're a scholar, top-notch in Medieval Literature, the foremost authority on demonology. Your books are the last word on the subject, and you've proven yourself the best by conjuring up the last available demon left in Hell—me.

"Look inside yourself, Willis. You're the needle; they're the thread. It's not a magic spell, but a whole cloth, that you want to weave."

"But what about my job?" Willis asked. "I can't do it if the two of them are plotting against me. Especially since Gertrude's so thick with Dean Smith that—"

Anathae had drifted close enough to lay her finger against his lips. "The power must be preserved wherever it is found," she said. "When I perceive it, I cannot destroy it. We've wreaked a sort of havoc on Gertrude's life by making her beautiful—it would be a double cruelty to take it away from her, no matter how she misuses it, now that we've given it to her.

"Besides," she said as she landed in his lap and slid her arms around his neck, "inside, you know the real solution. You don't need any help from



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me."

Anathae's green dress vanished. And for a while Willis did not think about his problem at all.

It snowed all the next week, and twice the temperature fell below zero. Willis sat staring out his office window at the grey sky that seemed to clamp onto the horizon like a helmet. He was alone there, but by the way he sat tapping his pencil on the desk, it was obvious that he did not expect to be alone for long. Indeed, there was a knock at his door.

"Come in," he said firmly.

The door swung open and Gertrude Twill, the latest epitomy of female beauty, and Larry Hawthorne, erstwhile slug, came in. Neither smiled.

"I've been expecting you," Willis said.

Larry's hand floated across Gertrude's back as she sat down. Then he slid into the chair next to hers. "What's this about, Baxter?"

"I'd like to think of this as a continuation of the discussion we started yesterday," Willis said as he'd rehearsed.

Gertrude started to rise. "We have nothing to discuss."

Willis waved her back into the seat. "Sit, Gertrude." And miraculously she did. "I rather think we do."

"If you're looking for a bargain," Hawthorne said, "no deal. Our terms remain the same. You either recommend in that report you're being so secretive about that I be named to take your place, in which case you keep your job as Professor of Medieval Lit, or we'll break you the hard way, in which case you won't."

Gertrude unpursed her pouting, Clara Bow lips. "I already have a memo from Norman Rockhurst, stating that he would be just as pleased to see Larry in your position. You really shouldn't have offended Rockhurst, Willis."

"I agree," Willis said. "However, that's not why I called you here. Hah! Although you know, maybe it is."

Gertrude and Hawthorne exchanged nervous glances.

"What I mean," Willis continued, "is I don't need you to recapitulate what you've already told me, because I have it right here." He held out a grey band about four inches wide.

Hawthorne stared in bewilderment. "What—"

Willis smiled. "Gertrude already knows what it is, and I'm surprised that you don't, Larry. We use them often enough. It's a dictaphone belt. Here, let me show you I'm not bluffing." He put the belt on a dictaphone that peeped out from amid the papers on his desk. With a swift movement, he turned on the machine, and Hawthorne's voice croaked from the tiny speaker:

*". . . can put the screws to you, buddy. Gert's got Dean Smith wrapped around her little finger and she's working on Rockhurst. You can say what you want about us to the Dean and he won't hear you. But you better believe that we can put a bug in his ear that . . ."*

Willis clicked the machine off. "See? Now I admit the fidelity's not so great. Dean Smith might believe that's you—and Gert too, by the way. He might believe it, or he might think I trumped up the whole thing against you. What do you think?"

Gertrude glowered and Hawthorne glanced at her, then decided to imitate her expression.

Willis took the belt from the machine. "But we'll never know, because I don't intend to use this. I just



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wanted you both to know that I *could* have played your game." He tossed the belt to Hawthorne who caught it.

Hawthorne looked at the belt in disbelief. "I don't understand."

"You will," Willis said, "when you read my report. It's already been approved by Dean Smith. By the way, he'll be wanting to talk to you."

"Wha—what about?"

"I shouldn't tell you, but I will. Dean Smith concurs with me that you're the best man to head up our new department of student impetus."

Hawthorne squinted knowingly. "I would be reporting to you, of course—"

Willis shook his head. "No. The department will be University-wide—not just A&S. I'll be glad to cooperate with you in any way I can. Will have to, in fact—the position will carry the title Assistant Dean. This could be the beginning of elevated academic achievement for our students—*all* our students."

Hawthorne looked bewildered. "I—But— That is— Why?"

"Why? A couple of reasons. First, if you were under me or just off to the side of me, you'd still keep bucking for my position. And frankly, Larry, I don't think you could handle it. You'd get swamped in the paperwork; you'd focus on your narrow, but useful, band of interest, and everything else would fall by the wayside. Second, I think it's high time we called an end to this useless rivalry. It would be one thing if it were real competition—the best man would win and then the students would benefit. But it isn't. So what it boils down to is a) I want you out of my hair, but b) in the place where you'll best benefit the students of Powhattan University. I don't find it all that unfortunate that the 'place' puts you in a position that's higher than mine. Understand?"

Hawthorne seemed at the point of tears. "Yes, I . . . I think I do. And I agree. Willis, I don't know how to thank you. And may lightning strike me if I ever . . ."

A strange expression crossed his face. "Oh no, not again. I—" He rose and placed his right index finger on the top of his head, then began to sing an aria from *Madam Butterfly*. He went out the door, his hand on his head, still singing.

Willis turned to face Gertrude. "And then there's you."

Gertrude was distracted. "He keeps *doing* that." As she focussed on Willis, her expression returned to a glower. "What about me? You can't buy me off with a fancy position. And I'm still out to get you. You can record that and pass it on to Dean Smith, if you like. I don't care."

"Did I hurt you that much?" Willis asked.

Gertrude sneered. "You? Hurt me? That's the most ridiculous—"

"Not so ridiculous, Gert. Why else would you be working so hard to hurt me?"

She did not deign to reply.

"I almost wish you were one of my students, then I'd have the right to lecture you. But I don't have any such right. We were friends, a little more at one time. I think you thought I might marry you; I think I thought you might be right. But, as you know, I met and fell for someone else, and so rejected you.

"I'd like to suggest, Gertrude, that maybe that wasn't the worst thing that could have happened to both of us. Maybe someday you'll look in a mirror and see the lovely young woman looking back at you and you'll wonder why it ever mattered to you that I went to someone else. I think



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you have the inner beauty to match the outer one. And when you find it, you'll discover you can have any man you want. *If* you want.

"In the meantime, I hate to see what you're doing to yourself. I'm not worth it. Getting your vengence on me isn't worth it, if you have to degrade yourself to do it. Dean Smith. Larry Hawthorne. *Norman Rockhurst*, for God's sake.

"Oh hell, I wasn't going to lecture . . ."

Gertrude let her eyes slip from Willis to the stained yellow carpet at her feet. "No, I think maybe you're right. I dunno. I'll have to think—"

"I hope you do," Willis said gently. "I hope you do. We have a University to run here, Gert. Hopefully, some of the young men and women who come through here will learn something, may make all of our lives better for having been here. We need you, Gert—Dean Smith, myself, Larry. You know as well as I do that the place would run down without you. We can't work together if we're going to be enemies at each other's throat.

"Gert, if we can't work together as friends, I'll have to—"

Anger flashed across Gertrude's face. "—have me fired? You try it."

Willis shook his head. "I'll have to give you this." He handed a paper to Gertrude, and she crackled it smooth before her and began to read.

She looked up suddenly. "Your resignation?"

"Not because of your threats. Not because you can get the Dean or Rockhurst or any number of men to arrange it. It's because you want it, because a house divided cannot long stand."

Gertrude's eyes softened. "Will, I—"

"You've got it—keep it. Any time you want, I'll sign it. I owe you at least that much."

Gertrude crumpled the resignation paper. "If you don't mind, Mr. Baxter, I have more important things to do. Xeroxing copies of your report, for one."

Willis laughed, but Gertrude had grown very solemn. She rose, shook his hand and then left, all before he had time to think about what had just happened.

Willis turned back toward the window behind his desk, contemplating the leaden sky and the wind that had begun to send the powdery snow into deep drifts. It would be a cold walk home.

It was only for an instant that he saw the reflection of his own face in the glass—and Anathea's impish smile superimposed over it.

There was a snapping of fingers, then Willis Baxter had disappeared.

—MICHAEL F. X. MILHAUS

---

**ON SALE IN OCTOBER AMAZING (JULY 19th)**

**A WORLD OF ONE'S OWN,** A Complete short novel by **DAVE BISCHOFF & TED WHITE, NEVER SO LATE** by **F.M. BUSBY, FAR FROM EVE AND MORNING** by **THOMAS F. MONTELEONE, THE SLEEPING BEAST** by **A. BERTRAM CHANDLER, THE KING IS DEAD: LONG LIVE THE QUEEN!** by **STEPHEN TALL** and many more stories and features.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# INDIGESTION

## BARRY N. MALZBERG

*Herewith a new Malzbergian inquiry–into the psyche of a fiend . . .*

### Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

SOMETIMES I wonder how it might have been if, instead of the anonymous and forlorn, I had instead ingested the bodies of the famous. The cells of Spinoza swimming and mingling with my own bright and burbling blood, the obsessions of Beethoven, the clear and cunning visions of Jennings Bryan taken unto me and merged with my bloodstream . . . why I might have been anything, anything at all!' I would have been a congregation, a celebration unto myself, not Henry of this common nature (which for all the ecstasy of my activities is what I am; I know my limitations) but a Henry Transmogrified, carrying within himself the seeds and decomposition of all who were the best. If the gobbling of a corpse enables one (as I humbly believe) to take upon many of the *intellectual* qualities of the deceased then it is clear that I am limited only by the limitations of those within me . . still, the limitation is absolute. I frequent bleak graveyards located far from the fashionable suburbs; I content myself with fresh gravesites unattended—which can only mean that the deceased left as little of a mark in the departure from life as in the partaking—I observe the amenities of my cruel and inexplicable trade by working as much as I can on the periphery of feeling. Not for me the leap into the still-open grave surrounded by mourning relatives and creditors, not for me either an attempt to insinuate myself nearer the deceased by obtaining a job in the trade: mortician, laboratory attendant, morgue custodian and so on. For me there is an appreciation of the amenities of feeling. I observe them. I do what I must not without a bright thread of shame. I admit that I am a fiend.

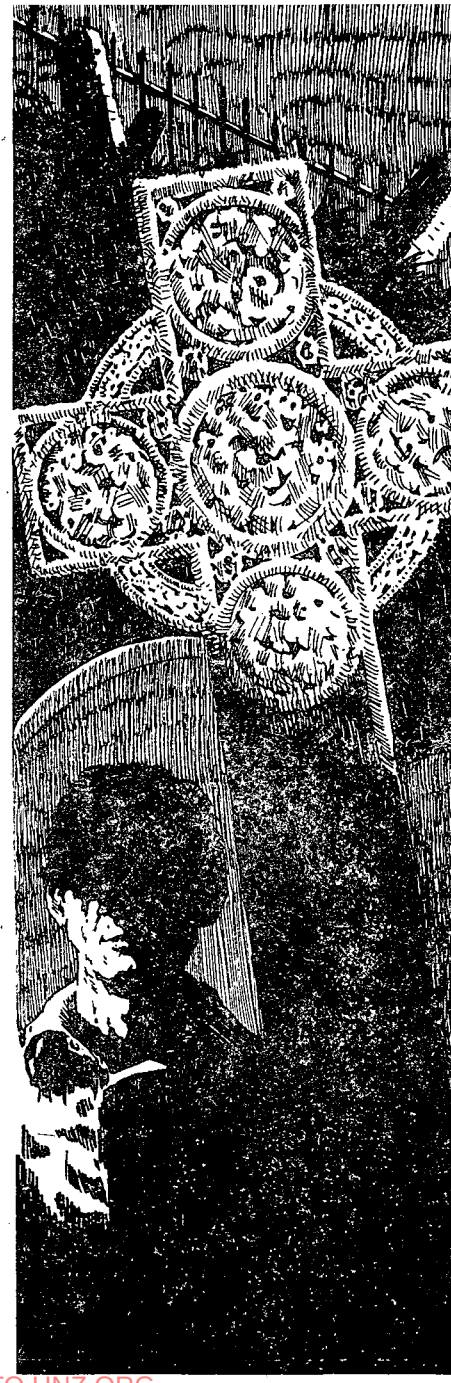
Spinoza and Beethoven, the Kennedys or the cellular decomposition of Nobel Prize winners revolve with me not; I suit myself with simpler game, not a little of it (I will admit this too) gathered from the potter's fields. I own a shortwave radio and keep up with the latest police reports; if a derelict is delivered anonymously DOA to a hospital I want to be prepared to call upon him tomorrow. But it is not me, it is Henry no longer, it is (as I have said) a congregation which now takes itself upon these tours; the dead feed upon the dead and all two hundred and fifty-five of us, the origi-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nal Henry and parts of the two hundred and fifty-four he has consumed, prowl about their obsessive errands. I am more than a congregation, I am a civilization, an urban culture (or at least a medium-sized village) to myself. At the end of all of this, I am sure, lies a knowledge so absolute that only the amorphous outlines of the goal, rosy in their radiance, are there to tantalize me. I do not know what I (what we) am (are), I only know that I must go forward. Besides, the dead are very tasty. Eating parts of decomposed corpses is exciting, not only a bizarre gourmet treat but, as a meal taken-on-the-run heightened by a sense of mortality, of imminent capture. One can enjoy the task for its own sake. I enjoy eating the dead. I already warned you that I was a fiend.

So MUCH for exposition and all of this in the personna of the original Henry, the corpse-eating Henry who began his journey just three and a half years ago. But Henry, now thirty-seven, can hardly be said to exist any more; his fragile, mean soul has been overtaken by the souls of the two hundred and fifty-four ingested so that the congregation clangs and bangs against itself nervously within the confines of the tenement that is Henry's personna. Each of the two hundred and fifty-four would have its tale to tell; each of them could make its own case. They have found their immortality within Henry; this is firmly believed and each of them (as are all the living too) is an individual but the stories would remit to a common banality, a reiteration of the germinal act of *having been eaten;* this would be rather repetitious and thus Henry, the true and final narrator of these adventures, Henry will suppress the





LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other two hundred and fifty-four in the interests of economy and fictional imperative, dealing only with the present instances as they refract into the past, as they summon up the future. It is he, after all, who has devised for the two hundred and fifty-four their immortality.

Into his rooms at some careful hour of the dawn Henry comes, his congregation chanting within him. Fluids toil murkily; Henry has spent the hours of the night at a cemetery in Forest Hills (Forest Hills!) where he has eaten richly of parts of an old woman buried not sixteen hours before. From his careful reading of the obituaries, from his tennis shoes and alert stalk, from his gloved hands, strong shoulders and wood-cutting devices, from his energy and ambition Henry has derived rich proceeds; he had gorged himself not only with a hand, a foot and an eyeball but (in a festival of gluttony) Henry has also eaten part of the chin and a weary, crushed in nose, these last two superfluities sickening him but Henry could not stop. Sometimes he is unable to control himself. Tossing over the dirt with shaking hands, replacing the marker guiltily, Henry stumbled away from the graveyard and onto a one hundred and two Queens Boulevard bus at the end of the line, his appearance bringing only desultory attention from the three inhabitants of the bus: a workman, a driver, a drug addict who sat nodding secretly in the back. Looking at Henry it is impossible to know what they might have made of his appearance, the dirt on his shoes, the dirt on his nostrils, his flushed and yet pallid demeanor but Henry knew what to make of them: looking at them it was as if he regarded not people but metaphors, metaphors for the corpses that they would be. Shyly and tentatively, yet with increasing boldness, Henry and his congregation regarded these three, wondering what it might be like at some date in the indefinite future to eat them, what their personalities might be like added to the two hundred and fifty-four already in his bloodstream, the two hundred and fifty-fifth making sliding entrance through gullet and bowels and they in turn looked back. Did they judge his thoughts? Regarding his shovel, the valise in which he held his wood-cutter, did these three have any inkling of that secret buzzing greedily in Henry's brain and throat like a demented insect? or did they simply think nothing at all; were their minds as clean and darkly panelled as the minds of the dead? Henry looked between his feet and thought nothing at all, afflicted with an indigestion so severe that it drove metaphysical speculation clear from the pulpit of his consciousness, from the church of his interior, from the congregation of his choice. He returned to his rooms.

Not unaware that he was a fiend, Henry took the usual precautions when he had emerged from the one hundred and two Queens Boulevard bus at the intersection of two numbered avenues. At one wastebasket he disposed of his gloves, at another of the woolen hat which he had worn for customary disguise and which had become smeared in a somewhat implicatory fashion, at a third (Henry, staggering from his indigestion, reeling down the length of Queens Boulevard pausing at wastebaskets to hurl into them objects might have had a riotous aspect to anyone who was watching; Henry is not unaware of his appearance or how his activities might strike an appalled and unreasoning world, for this reason he takes more than the usual precautions with his activities and tries to



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

write about himself in the third person as much as possible so that anyone stumbling across these well-secreted notes posthumously might well think that I was talking about someone *else* which in more than a few senses is the case) Henry paused to retch, his insides convulsing as certain displacements took effect (he should not have had that eyeball) and then, somewhat eased in the flesh if not in the murmurings of the spirit, he returned to his rooms where he found the Other waiting for him as the Other so often does after these expeditions.

It might be necessary by laws of fictional imperative already referred to to discuss the Other, to talk about the background of the beast, to explain what it was doing in the rooms and why it and Henry have such undue familiarity, but if it is all the same to everyone, Henry will refuse this task. Henry will not discuss this anymore, being quite familiar with the appearance of the Other and the Other's reasons for being there and having discussed this at length in previous narratives. Besides, there are certain things which lie, perhaps, outside of any decent opinion of mankind, outside of any normal range of human behavior and which, when written about, when even *hinted* about, can cause only the most unusual disgust and revulsion, open up emotions and responses which are archaic and long since buried. Let them stay buried. There will be no material on the Other here other than to state that it was there again and that Henry felt the old twisting fear in his vitals. He had never gotten over his terror of the Other. Try as he had to supersede that terror, to realize that much of it was imaginary, that all of it could be overcome, he could not stop that feeling but indeed found himself in its thrall. Very much as did his congregation which squirmed, trembled in place, murmured warnings and imprecations. Half a congregation, three-quarters Henry, four-fifths what he had most recently consumed, Henry faced the Other as bravely as he could and said, "I thought I told you that I didn't want you here any more. I thought that we settled that last time. Come on. Get out of here."

The Other took a slightly different posture and said, "Come now, Henry, enough of this." It eyed him, saw the look on his face which must have told him everything, not that a ringing, foaming belch from Henry did not tell him more; small specks of blood that were not his then pouring from Henry's mouth to the corners of his lips. Henry wiped them slowly, trying not to call attention to this disaster but it was already too late. The face of the Other congealed. It licked its horrid lips.

"You've been doing it again," it said.

"That's none of your business. That's none of your affair."

"But I'm afraid that it is my affair, Henry. It's very much my responsibility; I'm implicated in this up to the hilt. Haven't I warned you?"

"Warn away," Henry said rather sullenly. He was terrified but still sullen; sullen but yet terrified; part of this having to do with the reactions of his congregation. Some of them were sullen but then again others of them were terrified. His reactions were never consistent because his congregation was inconsistent. It involved a cross-section. If Henry had partaken of a better class of person, if Henry had determined unto himself that he would seek only the best and the most consistent of personality traits, then things might have been quite different but then again Henry could


LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not control himself. Gluttony predominated and the urge to multiply. If one cannot multiply in one way then one must do it in another but this is a line of speculation which Henry finds very arcane and *he will not pursue it under any circumstances*. "Get out of here," he said again sullen and with terror. "Get out now."

"You've been eating people," the Other said flatly. "You've been going to graves and tearing them open and you've been taking out corpses and eating them. A finger here, an eyeball there, sometimes a whole hand, occasionally even an arm. I know what you're doing, Henry. Do you think I'm a fool? You've been warned again and again."

"It's none of your business," Henry said. He put down the valise with a clatter, walked then into the second of the two rooms of his two-room furnished apartment in which second room he walked to the window, looked down the clear pipe of the air-shaft to the sheer drop, three stories below, the implacable stones of the courtyard assuming to him in the first intimations of the dawn, the aspect of a kind of destiny. "None of your business," he repeated, hearing the footsteps of the Other as it came through the doorway and closed distance between them. There was no way to keep the horrid creature out.

"You've been warned and warned, Henry," the Other said, somewhat repetitously. "You've been warned nicely and you've been warned harshly. You've been begged and you've been threatened. You've been reasoned with and once we even looked at pictures together while I tried to explain to you nicely why you can't go around eating corpses. Every time I thought you got the point but you're hopeless, Henry. You just keep on doing it. It's got to stop."

Henry shook his head, standing against the window. "What I do is my business," he said, "besides," he added, "I've got not only myself to consider now. I'm eating for two hundred and fifty-five."

"That is lunacy, Henry. There are no two hundred and fifty-five. There is only you. Your personality does not increase through the personalities of those you ingest. The soul is ephemeral; it flies away at the moment of death. There is nothing but flesh. You lust to eat flesh, Henry. There is no congregation. There is only yourself and the rest is rationalization."

"Get out of here," Henry said severely. His stomach roiled at the thought that he might not be two hundred and fiffy-five but only himself. Alone, alone: always alone; the suggestion was obscene. It could not be. He knew if nothing else that ingestion had given him *companionship*. He put the thought away. "Get out or I'll strike you."

The Other giggled in a rather feminine way. It has a rather high voice when under stress, very much as Henry does although Henry can control himself better. "Don't be ridiculous," it said, "I can't get out. I won't get out. You can't get rid of me. This has got to stop."

"I mean it," Henry said turning from the window, raising his hand in a threatening way. "I've had quite enough of this now. Be gone with you."

The Other paused, looming, hanging just beyond Henry's reach. Its horrid little eyes turned meditative; its green scales prickled. It shook its beaked head. "I'm sorry," it said, "I'm sorry, Henry. This has just gone too far. You're quite dangerous and you won't be held back. I've tried reasoning and threatening; beggings



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and explanations. Still you go on looting graves, desecrating the friendless dead. This is hopeless. It has got to stop." It nodded solemnly, in a sudden and decisive way. "Yes," it said, "this has got to stop."

It closed upon Henry and a claw came out; suddenly Henry felt himself held within a tremendous and beckoning claw, yanked up against the scales of the creature. They exuded a foul odor; Henry felt the strength and conviction of the Other pouring into him and regrets suddenly spun the tumblers of his mind. Why hadn't he listened? Why hadn't he heeded the warnings? Why had he not understood that the Other was merely, as it had oft-repeated, doing this for his own good in lieu of more horrid actions? But it was too late for any of this of course. Henry knew how late it was. The Other had indeed threatened him and Henry had not thought that the threats would come to pass but now they had and as he clung to the horrid green of the creature, a slimy ooze coming from little pores like abcesses in the scales of the Other, Henry's whole life seemed to flick before his eyes, right up to his thirty-fifth year when these activities (and the Other) had entered his life. Why had he done it? Why had he found it necessary to have looked to the dead for sustenance when there were so many of the living? Insight like a belch exploded and expanded his consciousness but of course it was too late for any of this. With little peeps and cries his congregation fled the temple of his insides, plunged gabbling into the vestry of his unconscious and Henry realized that he was indeed alone, always to be alone.

"I'm afraid that I'm going to have to kill you now," the Other said. It inclined its tentacled head in a gesture gracious and somehow touching, something humanoid in the aspect. "It's for your own good, Henry," it pointed out. "This would just go on and on and eventually you'd wind up doing something really dangerous and stupid like frequenting funeral homes, looking around open coffins. This has got to be brought to an end."

And Henry said, "Yes, yes, I see what you mean," his breath cut off by that suffocating embrace, his body arched in a spasm of agreement for he did see, he truly saw what the Other was saying; he saw too that the Other, all along, had merely been trying to help him, to educate him into a better way of life and like all of the other opportunities offered him Henry had mocked and lost this last of them—but too late, too late for any of this, "I'm sorry," the Other said, "Henry I'm truly sorry but there must come an end to this," and guided him toward the window, centered Henry against it and then with one terrific thrust sent Henry arching and vaulting through the glass; for one instant hanging high in the air his skin severed by a thousand cuts, his body at dreadful stillness, looking at the Other Henry thought that he understood everything right down to the Other's identity . . . but in the next instant as he began the long, expiring fall to the courtyard beneath, he realized that he understood nothing at all and that all of it must be—as it had always been—a mystery.

His last thought before his body explodes is not for himself but for his congregation as truly befits the minister he has tried to be . . . but his congregation is out of touch, no time for benediction, and all two hundred and fifty-five of them slant to the stones before rebounding, the parts of his dismembered body spokes, the impact fire.

—Barry N. Malzberg



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Darrell Schweitzer conducts the* Amazing Interview *in our sister magazine,* Amazing SF. *For his debut in this magazine he tells a story about the King of the Elves, a confrontation with the Champion of Satan, and two copper pennies . . . all on—*

# TOM O'BEDLAM'S NIGHT OUT

## DARRELL SCHWEITZER

### Illustrated by Joe Staton

"Swill! filth! Horse piss!" yelled the ragged man as he threw his bowl onto the stone floor.

"Ah, Tom," said the gaoler. "Be grateful for what ye got."

"Put something in this slop! Meat! A man needs meat to be strong!"

"But meat's expensive, Tom. If ye had two pennies I'd give ye meat, but ye don't, so be quiet or else I'll call the doctor to purge your ill humours."

"I'll get two copper pennies then. I will!"

"Ha! A thief ye will be too? For that they'll hang ye, Tom. Stay a loon and be safe."

And laughing, the gaoler left.

Sad Tom, mad Tom, tattered Tom, removed a bar from his window on this night of All Hallows, in the year of Our Lord 1537. He tied his blanket into a rope and climbed down to the muddy street below. He wandered through shadows and empty lanes beneath a round full moon, and the first person he met was met a half a mile away, near the edge of King Harry's good town of London, and this person was a little boy.

"Are you the bogey-man?" he was asked, and if ever an answer was likely that was it.

But Tom made a face and waved his arms and stuck out his tongue and sputtered, "No! I'm the Devil! Gobblegobblegobble!" and the child ran away in terror, screaming that he had seen the Devil.

Tom laughed. He went a little further and met a maid with a bucket in hand.

"Going a'milking?" said Tom. "Not a good night for that. The Devil's loose I hear."

"I'm not milking, sir," replied she, drawing back.

"Then you should! You should!" He pinched her with both hands in two places where she would not be touched. The maid let out a shriek, Tom a yelp of delight, and the two of them were quickly parted. Tom continued on until the houses thinned out and the stink of the city was behind him. He came to a field, in the middle of which a rock moved.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was a boulder larger than a man, ınd much heavier too, and yet it noved up and down as if an unseen giant were hefting it. Then suddenly t flew up, up, up, and a star winked ıs it passed by.

"Won't be back till tomorrow," said ı little piping voice. Tom looked lown and saw a little man standing where the stone had been, a fellow ıot more than five inches tall and clad n an oak leaf.

"You are very strong," said Tom. 'You must eat fine meat to get that way."

"Indeed," said the man. "The highs of men roasted, the breasts of naids toasted, little babies' whole and aw, your mother's rump, I eat them ıll—"

"I think I must be getting back. I can't be out this late." Tom began to run, but the little man's voice followed him.

"Wait! You I shall not eat, for the King of Elves holds court tonight and ıe has summoned you. There's a great reward waiting for you."

Tom stopped, turned around, and came back.

"A reward?"

"Yes. Follow me."

He followed, over fields and fences ınd walls, through hedges and trees, ılong roads and over them, into a swamp and out again, all the while alling behind as the other ignored he obstacles that so tormented Tom.

"Slow down," he called out at last, 'or I'll lose you."

"You're not lost. You're found. You're here."

And Tom emerged from a final thicket of thorns onto a wide plain where there was a great bonfire tended by witches, and before long ıe came to the old log which was the throne of the King of Elves. He saw

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that the King was not tiny, but tall as a mortal man, with a robe of soft green and a flowing red beard. The Queen of Elves sat beside the King, also dressed in green, and there were strings of acorns in her hair. The King spoke.

"Thomas, you have been called here by me to be my champion. You must joust for me as one must every year for my honor with the enemy. If you are victorious a wish will be granted to you from the fullest resources of my magic."

"And if I lose?"

"Why then," laughed the King, "my tithe to Hell will be paid until next year."

Tom knew he was in dire peril then, but he knew also that there was no escape through the throngs around him, so he made the best of it and joined the feast that was being held for the occasion. He joked with the gnomes and dwarves, took fairies by the dozens into his lap, and he ate well of meats no one has tasted in a thousand years. He drank deep of the molten liquor they brewed, and would have forgotten his predicament entirely had not a bent old man with a white beard trailing along the ground, with lantern and thorn branch in hand and a mangy dog trailing behind, come into the midst of them wailing, "Hellgate is open. The time has come. The foe has arrived. The time has come."

"Who is that?" whispered Tom to one beside him.

"The Man In The Moon, although presently not in the Moon," was the reply.

"And the foe?"

"Look."

The crowd drew away from the fire as it flamed brighter than ever, and out of the middle of it came one who was unmistakably Satan himself, and after him a knight on a black horse wearing black armor, with the face of a skull revealed beneath his upraised visor. His lance was aflame and his eyes seemed to be. Smoke snorted from the nostrils of his mount.

Greetings were exchanged between the Devil and the King, and the Lord of Elves called on Tom.

"Rise and come forward, champion, and fight in my name."

"But—but I have no horse—"

"Then take one, made of air." The King waved his hand and the dust beath Tom's feet began to stir. He was caught in a whirlwind and raised up. He felt the muscles of a horse rippling beneath him. He felt a saddle, and his feet found stirrups, but to his eye there was nothing except a dim shape, like a cloud. His steed whinnied and stamped.

"I have no lance," said Tom.

"Then take one." A burning twig was brought from the edge of the fire.

"*This* is a lance?"

"Take it," commanded the King and Tom took it by the end that wasn't afire. As soon as he touched it it lengthened and grew and became a fine, flaming lance indeed.

"Now the battle shall begin," said the King.

"But I lack a helmet," said Tom, desperate for excuses.

"Take one then." The same witch who had handed him the twig now offered a leaf, and he put it on his head where it became a silver helmet with two slits to see through. She gave him also a plate which expanded into a shield, and she said a word and his rags were armor. Now without any more ways to delay the inevitable, Tom gulped hard and muttered a prayer to the Saviour. As he did the whole company hissed like a thousand snakes, and the King said angrily, "*Speak not such words!*"



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In silence Tom was led away from the fire on his horse of wind and dust, and the black knight followed to a place where there was plenty of room for combat. Only the King and the Devil stood near.

"Now fight," said the King, and Tom was terrified.

"But wait. I'm not ready. I don't know—"

"What don't you know?"

"Who am I fighting?"

"The same one who comes every year for this."

"You mean—nobody has ever beat him?"

"Tom, I have great hopes for you."

"Well who *is* he?"

"The Knight of Ghosts and Shadows. His name is Kamathakalamailetheknafor."

"*What?*"

"Such is his name. It is said that no mortal can repeat it, and thus none can gain power over him."

"Then how shall I—?"

"Good luck, my champion."

A trumpet sounded. The Knight of Ghosts and Shadows lowered his visor, and his lance. With no further warning he spurred his horse and charged. Tom in his confusion fumbled for the invisible rein of his barely visible steed. At the same time he kicked it in the ribs and the creature bolted forward. His lance was up, then down, then swaying side to side. When the two met Tom's point missed his opponent entirely, while the other's crashed into his shield and broke it like the old plate it was. The force of the blow sent Tom tumbling to the ground.

He landed with a clang of metal and lay stunned. When next he was aware the Knight stood over him with a red hot sword upraised, and helpless Tom, who had raved wilder before, cried out, "Oh spare me Kamathakalmailetheknafor, please!"

And the Knight of Ghosts and Shadows paused, and began to sway, and then he fell over backwards. At the same time Tom's armor became his rags again, and with the weight off him he was able to sit up. He saw his smoldering spear on the ground a good way off, and at his feet was a skeleton in a rusty suit, which crumbled as he watched, became only a heap of bones, then dust, then nothing at all.

The King of Elves lifted him to his feet, and all shouted his praises except Satan, who scowled and stalked back into the fire, took the flames with him and shut the door to Hell. By the light of the stars and the moon another feast was held, and this time Tom was treated like a god.

"Now Champion," said the King after a while. "What reward will you take?"

"I—I—uh—hadn't thought—I don't know."

"Would you like to be King of India?"

"I don't know."

"Well then know." And the Elfking took a wand and touched Tom on the head with it. All the folk around him vanished, and the field did also. For a minute Tom was King of India, sitting on his throne while eunuchs fanned him with huge feathers, and a hundred African maidens danced before him.

"It's awfully hot there," he said when he came back, "and I don't know how to rule anyway."

"Then do you desire riches?"

"Riches?"

"All the gold in the mountains of the Moon. Look up."

Tom looked up at the full moon which still had no man in it, and he felt himself floating. As if he were made of smoke he rose above the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

earth. Below him the field grew small and vanished, and he saw all of England, then all the sea, then all the world. The round face of the moon grew larger, until it filled the whole sky. Then he was falling down, not up, into the valleys and mountains of the moon. He came to a stop in the middle of a barren plain and saw huge ingots the size of elephants strewn about, and mountains of pure gold in the distance, and even a volcano which spewed forth a golden stream. Then he was back on earth again and he said, "I could never carry that."

"Will you make up your mind, soon?" The King was growing impatient. "Dawn will be coming abovelong, and you must choose before then."

And Tom, afraid of losing all the riches and power and privilege in the world, could say nothing at all.

"Well, think," said the King. "What did you most recently wish for? What did you want this morning?"

"Two copper pennies," blurted Tom, before he knew he'd said it.

"Done! Two copper pennies you shall have."

"Wait, I—"

"Two copper pennies." The King clapped his hands and did a little dance, and his shape began to change. He shifted into something not at all human, and he shrank and darkened, and sprouted feathers. His neck grew disporportionately long; his lips grew out from his face and became a bill; his arms flattened into wings. The King had turned himself into a black swan. Tom looked on in amazement, and he began to feel sick. He seemed to be falling. His limbs would not obey him, and he looked up to see how the Man Not In The Moon, the witches, and even the dwarves towered over him. In the place of his hands he discovered black feathers, and knew then that he had become a swan too.

"Follow," said the King in a voice that sounded odd coming from the bill of a swan.

The two of them took to the air. It was natural for Tom, like running or jumping. It seemed that he had always known how to fly. He soared with the King away from the field, away from the Isle of Britain entirely, over the channel, across France, and above another sea. The moon was a lantern to light their way, and when clouds closed beneath them there was yet another ocean, this one all of glowing mist. They overtook night-owls in their flight, and bats, and even a witch on her broom. All were left behind as Tom followed the King until land was beneath them again. They dropped lower, passed two artificial mountains, and followed a river. They came at last to a hidden place, to the catacombs of Nephren-Ka in the forgotten valley of Hadoth by the banks of the Nile, to the tomb of a Pharaoh the histories never mention. At the door of the tomb they became men very briefly, then serpents, and on their bellies they wriggled between the stones, down into the deepest vault where the coffin of the Black Pharaoh lay. The snake who was the Elfking caused there to be a faint light, and Tom could see the grim, shrivelled face of the Pharaoh, and the two copper coins laid on his eyes.

"There are young pennies, Tom," said the King. "Take them in your mouth and come away. There isn't much time."

And so Tom wriggled over the corpse of the one who had rested there so many centuries and scooped up the two pennies of the eyes to reveal a hateful glare undiminished by time. He screamed at the sight and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nearly swallowed the coins. The light went out, and in complete darkness the Elfking spoke.

"Come! Hurry!"

The two of them crawled back between the stones, and up out of the tomb. Tom followed the other only by the rustling of the King's dry body, and by smell, which was much more acute than it had been when he had a human nose. At last dim light appeared ahead, and they emerged onto the desert sand. To the east the sky was beginning to brighten.

"Be quick," said the King, "If daylight catches us we can never resume our true forms." He changed them both into swans once more, and off they flew, racing the dawn all the way back to England.

This time the clouds beneath them were not a sea but a land, a wondrous country brought alive by the sun, and hidden to those who dwell only on the ground. Tom thought he saw hills and valleys, bright castles with tall white towers overlooking glowing fields. Where the clouds broke there were vast cataracts dropping to the unimaginable world below.

They flew on until London was beneath them, and the swan that was the Elfking said to Tom, "Go now where you will, and touch ground only when you have arrived, for when you do you'll be a man again." Then he folded his wings and dropped away into the retreating darkness, and was seen no more.

Tom winged on, over the palace, over the bridge and the Thames, until he came to Bishopgate. He swooped very low and a night watchman saw him, and wondered what was the meaning of this strange thing, this swan with coins in its bill. The watchman came for a closer look as Tom dropped behind a fence. He found him there, looking dazed, but there was no swan. Tom had changed, spit out the coins, and pocketted them the instant before the guard arrived. He was recognised.

"You! What are you doing loose? You know where you belong."

"I know, and I've nowhere else to go."

"Then I'll take you back." The watchman took Tom by the scruff of the neck and dragged him throught the still empty and dark streets as morning began to break over the city. He came to a familiar old building with a wooden sign swinging over the door which read:

BETHLEHEM HOSPITAL
FOR THE DEMENTED
God Help all ye
who enter here.

"Is this one of yours?" demanded the guard of the gaoler.

"It is."

"Then see that he doesn't get out again."

When the watchman was gone, Tom said, "I've got the two pennies, like I said I would."

"Did ye now? Indeed?"

"In fact and also in deed."

"Quick! Show me them before anyone else wakes up."

Tom gave him the two coins, and the gaoler puzzled over the unfamiliar designs on them.

"Will you put meat in my soup now?"

The gaoler dropped one penny in his pocket, and held up the other. "The first is to make up for the trouble ye caused by running away, but the second will buy ye something for your dinner, as long as ye tell me where you got them."

Tom told him the whole story, leaving out no details, and distorting it very little. When he was done he was not believed, as he had feared. The gaoler looked at him silently for a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moment with a mixture of disgust and pity, then sighed, "Ah Tom, you're mad as ever and nothing will change that."

He put Tom back in his cell, and dropped the second coin in with the first, but the two did not rest there. The end was not yet, not quite anyway.

The gaoler sent a boy down into the cellar to kill a rat for the soup, then forgot about Tom altogether. He paced back and forth desperately, waiting for the long hours to pass until the shops would open, the coins like red-hot coals in his pocket, so eager was he to spend them. The gaoler was not a thrifty man.

At last a steeple clock struck nine, and the time was come. He ran out into the street, past windows filled with tempting things, and made his first stop an inn. Inside, he ordered a drink, had one of his new pennies changed, and it was only a moment before the innkeeper was turning the coin over and over in his hand and muttering, "This money isn't English. And it isn't French, or Spanish."

Just then the inkeeper's wife came by. She took one look and pronounced, "It's not money at all. It's fake!"

"Fake! Fraud! Counterfeit!" The cry was raised by all there, by all who stood in the street outside, and a mob formed. They chased the gaoler back the way he had come yelling, and a sheriff joined them, and several guardsman with pikes.

When they got to the hospital the crowd huddled outside while the sheriff and the guards went in one minute and came out the next with the offender in custody.

"'Tis death to counterfeit," the sheriff intoned righteously.

"*What?*" came a voice. "Would you put to death a poor lunatic that doesn't know right from wrong?"

Everyone turned, and there was Tom standing in the street. He'd climbed out of the window again and come down to see what all the excitement was about. His eyes met the gaoler's and no words were spoke, but a message was passed:

*Help me Tom. They'll kill me if ye don't. I'll do anything. Please.*

"Who are you?" demanded the sheriff.

"I'm the keeper."

"What? He's the keeper!"

"Oh no, he's a lunatic. We let him play his game of being the keeper to keep him good. Otherwise he's violent. His wit's diseased."

And at that moment the gaoler was so astonished that he looked the part.

"You mean," said the sheriff, "that he's—*mad?*"

"Quite."

"Then he belongs in a cell, not out here loose!"

"He does."

The sheriff ordered the guards, "You there! Take him inside and lock him in a cell."

They did, and from their looks when they came out you'd think they had been handling a leper.

"Than you," said Tom. "You've all been very helpful."

"See that he doesn't get out again," said the sheriff. "If he does, lunatic or not, I'll have his head."

"I'll keep him safe. Don't worry."

SOME HOURS LATER Tom found the rat meat the boy had left, and he put it in the gaoler's soup.

"Here's meat for you," said Tom, "and I won't charge you for it. Not anything. Not a penny."

"Ah Tom," the other sighed, "Ye're the soul of kindness."

—DARREL SCHWEITZER



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Editorial (cont. from page 4)

chant, and a photographer; he lived to enjoy more than twenty years of retirement. We had common interests in electricity—he taught me the principles and watched me put them to use in wiring my first model railroad—and later in high fidelity sound. Our tastes in music diverged almost completely, however; I sometimes suspect that this was inevitable.

On Thursday, April 7th, the day before Good Friday, I helped carry his casket to its burial place and said my private goodbyes.

My own interest in music has carried me in many directions. In the fifties I was preoccupied with jazz, and at the end of that decade my first professional editorial position was that of Contributing Editor to *Metronome* magazine (a magazine which, due to publishing difficulties, was to last only another two years after I joined its staff). But the jazz which excited me died at the end of the fifties, pushed aside by the formula of funk and the new enthusiasm for "free" jazz, and exists now in the work of only a very few people, primary among them Charles Mingus (himself perhaps past his creative prime, if recent reports are to be believed).

After *Metronome* folded I took a vacation from jazz, pursuing modern "serious" music (20th Century music), and getting professionally involved in science fiction as both editor and author. Then the Beatles came along and popular music, in a doldrums for the previous half-decade, was suddenly reborn. I followed the new developments with increasing excitement as young rock musicians began to push back the barriers of form and expression. The late sixties were particularly exciting for anyone concerned with the development of a popular form into an art form (parallel in many respects to jazz, although not then acknowledged on that level by most jazz musicians and critics—some of whom have yet to catch on, ten years later). Alas, rock music began backpedalling in this country during the seventies and almost all of the new development occurred overseas, primarily in Britain. As I followed this, I found myself tracking down the foreign music press and those record stores which stocked imported albums—most of which were utterly alien to me. But as I began investigating these imports I discovered a tremendously fecund musical culture in Germany, in Italy, and in a variety of other Continental countries (principally Scandinavia). I began hunting down ever more obscure labels and groups, I made contacts with importers (the retail prices of imported albums being rather too expensive), and, inevitably, I became involved in the rock press.

This was not precisely new for me. In 1964 I published a column on rock in *Folking Around*, a Cambridge publication to which another contributor was Paul Williams. A year later I ran off the first issue of *Crawdaddy*, Paul's new magazine, on my basement mimeograph. I contributed to *Crawdaddy*, both under Paul's editorship and that of a subsequent editor and publisher. But I avoided serious involvement in the rock press for two reasons. The first, was that I did not agree with the principles that were already developing in rock journalism, and especially in rock criticism—I felt them antithetical to those general principles of criticism which had already been evolved in literature and music, and with which I generally agreed. I considered most rock criticism to be self-indulgent if not actually masturbatory, founded on willful ignorance, and useless for most readers. (I've had more than one argument with Paul—the founding father of rock criticism—on this subject; we remain friends.) And the second reason was that I was too busy anyway.

In 1975 some friends of mine



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decided to put on a Rock Expo in Washington, D.C., and I helped them out with a long essay (10,000 words) for the centerpiece of their program book, and by acting as an Emcee at the program (thus meeting Hunter Thompson, who had long impressed me). The Expo was a financial failure, but out of its ashes my friends brought out a magazine, *Sounds Fine*, devoted primarily to ads from and for record collectors. I gave them a column of reviews, for which I was not paid, but over which they exercised no editorial restrictions. Thus, in a small way, I found myself with one foot in rock journalism again.

A few months ago an editor at *The Unicorn Times*, the Washington-area entertainment paper, called me up and asked me to contribute a column. He wanted it to concern itself with Continental rock—imports, in other words, and an area in which I was now something of an expert. (In three years I had collected almost a thousand import albums.) I was amazed by the effects of the publication of my first columns. At concerts and club dates my name received a recognition never before achieved in nearly twenty years of professional publication. People shook my hand with eagerness.

Washington is fortunate to have one of the finest—in terms of programming—progressive rock stations in the country, WGTB-FM. Friends from other parts of the country are always amazed when they hear the music played on this station, which is university-owned and non-commercial. Import albums play a large part in the station's programming. I've been marginally involved with the station—mostly as a listener—for some time now. I've met and made friends of a number of the staff, the first of whom, Ken Steiner, (as it turns out) due to a common interest in jazz. (We broadcast a 1960 taped interview I'd done with the late Eric Dolphy, interspersed with appropriate music, more than a year ago. Oddly enough, Eric—who died in 1964—was a science fiction enthusiast although not a fan.) Ken has been after me for months to get my FCC license so I could do a show of my own. At a recent Tangerine Dream concert I was introduced to another of WGTB's programmers, Eleanor, with whom I did a show devoted to obscure Italian progressive rock on the following night, and she too felt I should do a regular show of my own. With this much momentum pushing me, I expect I shall.

Over the Easter weekend the Balticon 11 was held at the Hunt Valley Inn, just outside Baltimore. My official involvement included taking part in Friday night's entertainment and moderating a panel on the Pulp Traditions in SF with Norman Spinrad and Samuel R. Delany on Sunday, but I was surprised by the number of people—some of whom I knew and some whom I did not know—who came up to me to tell me they'd heard the show I did with Eleanor the previous week. (Most of their comments were favorable, but one told me he thought the music we'd played was "awful"—can't win 'em all. . . )

What all of this suggests to me is that the sf/fantasy world and that of progressive rock are intertwined to a fair extent (it's not just me); and, also, that my interest in this type of music is moving me once again in new directions. But then, it's spring. Time for new growth. Time to get moving again, after a winter of cave-huddling; time to explore new vistas.

—TED WHITE

LIMITED SUPPLY OF COPIES AVAILABLE
50th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE AMAZING STORIES
A COLLECTORS ITEM
$1.00
ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO. INC. 69-62 230 St, BAYSIDE, QUEENS, N.Y. 11364

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Islands (cont. from page 29)

filled with souls, scavengers leaching away his will and his life.

*"You have to die to live,"* whispered the sky as it settled down into the leathery leaves of the trees.

Ned caught himself snoring, winding down with the slow-time, dying pleasantly. He waited for his blood to stop coursing and his hair to fall out.

He dreamed of walls and stones and caves and tunnels, dreamed them around himself.

He fashioned his own prison and awakened in his dream.

He screamed, denying the world, especially Ahasuerus, even as he shouted his name.

*"Then go,"* shouted Ahasuerus; it was a voice that cut the air with anger. *"Try to run."*

The words were walls.

Suddenly Ned was alone, walled out of the screaming world of souls. He had been pushed into the red-lands of Urgap, from one dream to another. Ahasuerus's voice no longer rang in his ears. Everything was dead quiet; not even the wind dared to stir and raise a dustdevil.

Before him was the red-hued, inhospitable steppelands, roughly carved out as if by God's impatient hand. Mountains were jagged against the clear sky. The earth was made of umbers and ochers. In the distance, Ned could make out conefields, white against the reddish tuff. Each cone had a basalt cap; the oldest, most weathered rocks were balanced on pole-thin bases.

Not even stone can stand up to the scouring of time, Ned thought. The swells and rockthrusts resembled rough buildings, a jagged city for ghosts and holymen. Goreme was dead as stone. It was as if time had been running backwards and the new evolving life and its soul of souls were being buried in another vitalistic dream. Goreme was just another ruse, a dream, another palimpsest.

I'm still not out of it, he thought. This place also belonged to Ahasuerus. Ned had removed himself from one prison only to be trapped in another. He turned around to glimpse Taharahnugi's dream forest, curious to see if it would still be there.

Like an impenetrable wall, the evergreen rain forest divided one dream from another. From Ned's vantage ground, he could see that the trees formed three distinguishable canopies. The forest looked like green crystal; it reflected the sunlight and was growing like the gem-spurs in Hell to connect with Heaven and close him out forever.

Ned sensed the invisible tentacles that still anchored him to Ahasuerus and Taharahnugi's dream forest. Taharahnugi was growing stronger; if he could, he would bury Ned in woodland dreams, heavy dreams that smelled of rot and time.

The deadly silence felt like pressure in Ned's ears. This dry, cracked land breathed solitude; Ned had never felt more isolated.

Perhaps this is death, he thought as he turned away from the forest and walked, hoping that he could pass through this empty dream into a world untouched by dreams.

Something cracked. Ned stopped, tilted his head to listen, and a thundering became louder. It sounded as if it were inside his head, the crashing noise that used to precede a bout of crying when he was a child.

But the noise was shaking the ground. It came from everywhere: from the sky, the rocks ahead, the ground beneath his feet, and from inside his head. He covered his ears with his palms, but that could not



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

keep out the sound.

Lightning cut across the sky, bolt after bolt, as if hurled by a hundred gods; and darkness edged the sky which first turned dark blue, then veridian, and finally purple.

Ned looked around for shelter, but something caught his eye: a jagged line that was moving toward him from the forest. The line was a crack in the earth, just as lightning appeared to be a crack in the sky, an evanescent opening into the yellow bliss of Heaven. But the crack in the earth could only be an opening into Hell.

Ned screamed for forgiveness, prayed, felt mindless terror. He could not swallow. His eyes were riveted on the growing crack in the earth. He was stone, agonized, living stone.

And he remembered a line from the Book: "And Laura turned to watch God's hand slap the earth, and was frozen for a thousand years, then melted by His grief so to become the great river that connects God's true island with Satan's sump."

A keening cut the air, and the crack ran a jagged line, throwing up dust and rock. Other cracks began to run from north to south, from different points along the edge of the dream forest; and cracks formed at oblique angles from the original crack that seemed to be growing wider as it became closer.

The earth was shaking, rattling, groaning.

With a shout, Ned turned to run. He could feel the hot winds eddying around him, the stinking effluvium that had been pressing to be released from the bowels of the earth. But the earth was cracking apart; cracks were converging upon him from the west as well as the east.

"Help," he shouted: the earth shrieked as if in response.

The ground roared. Lava bubbled out of a crack that fed into a larger one like a tributary. As the lava spilled over, filling the crack, it hardened into spurs and rills, one built atop another like crystal castles dreamed up by a mad architect. The lava was forest green; it hardened into chrysoberyl, beryl, and tourmaline.

The earth was shaking as if unseen hands were shaking a blanket. The ground was undulating slowly, moving up and down in great stone waves. Ned no longer felt the agonizing slow-time of fear; fear was mauling him now, tearing at his insides. He felt something warm coursing down his leg. Then he was thrown to the ground.

The crack ran past him like a huge locomotive, throwing up mountains in its wake. Boulders bounced like rubber balls, and the weathered stone cones were broken as if they were exposed fingers. Lightinig struck the ground nearby, fusing sand into glass.

Ned hoped for Ahasuerus's voice to whisper inside his head, but there was only the screaming of the earth. He was thrown this way and that. He prayed that he would not be swallowed by the earth. The ground was a drumhead, and Ned could feel its every reverberation. He watched the cracks move into the distance and guessed that they must be miles apart. As they reached the horizon, the ground began to groan like a wounded animal. It was almost a lowing sound.

With a shudder, the ground began to part along the crack beside him. The earth was tearing apart at the cracklines, as if it was a three-dimensional puzzle being dismantled piece by piece.

Ned closed his eyes and prayed . . .



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And found himself on an island floating beside other islands.

The smallest worldlet was less than a mile across.

Lightning connected island to sky, and a mist began to form. The sky became lighter, turned from purple to angry red, to rose, and finally faded into cerulean, the color of Sandra's eyes. A damp smell began to come off the land. Ned felt his shirt sticking to his skin; the mist made his skin shiny as if with sweat. A heavy silence reigned.

The sun appeared, burning through clouds that now moved between the islands on feather breezes like sailships through calm water. Ned felt the heat on his face and found himself looking at an island overhead in the distance. It created a moving shadow over the arid rockfields and new mountain range of his island. The pieces of the world were wrapped in an envelope of blue-tinged atmosphere that was really a huge cloud, perhaps ten thousand miles from edge to edge.

Although all was quiet again, Ned was too ill and weary to investigate his dreary island, which he guessed was about three or four miles long and a mile wide. He was situated near its edge, and was afraid to move closer and look out into the blue nothingness. He still waited for Ahasuerus to speak inside his head, for he had become used to these whisperings since he first sighted the birdbeast in Junction. But there was only the buzzing of his own thoughts, and yet he knew he was trapped in Ahasuerus's dream. He wondered if his dreams were affecting the soul of souls.

He yearned to hear a human sound that was not his own. He could not bear this utter isolation. Loneliness was a death of sorts; it distorted his thoughts, his senses. He could not be sure how much time had passed—if, indeed, time was passing at all. This might well be death, he thought; and he might be a ghost.

The sun remained fixed in the sky, obscured now and then by an island passing across its face. Other islands passed nearby like icebergs in a blue, calm sea. Ned could make out a nearby island covered with forest, the same dream-forest, he imagined, that he had escaped. The trees still reflected the sun like green stalagmites. It's a crystal worldlet, Ned thought, and Taharahnugi is still dreaming. Is Ahasuerus dreaming there, too, he asked himself, or is every island a separate dream, a universe cobbled by the sleeping soul of souls? He gazed out at the other islands as if he was staring for an eternal instant at dust motes trapped in a beam of blue light.

There was a grinding sound above him as two smaller islands came together, creating billowing clouds of dust and debris as they scraped against each other. One island had the rough shape of a bird missing a wing; the other was an oval shape, and Ned was reminded of loaves of bread, hot and steaming from the oven.

The grinding continued; large chunks were torn from the groaning land-masses. The faraway islands seemed to echo the noise, drawing an edge to Ned's nerves, making him queasy as he realized that this could happen to his small island.

He looked down into the blue which turned grey: he was too close to the island's edge. Standing up, he looked out upon the bleached rockscape beyond, at the stone hills that might have been turned and



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

smoothed on God's lathe. He noticed only one brown, dying tree at the base of the nearest hill. Green scrub grew around it, and a thin stream purled nearby, reflecting the sun into a golden snake.

And in the distance, a storm was boiling, throwing off electricity into the pale blue cloud that now filled in the spaces of the world. The islands, adrift in the blue atmosphere, created their own twilights and days and nights by casting shadows onto neighboring islands. A million shards of rock, clumps of turf, all the flotsam and jetsam of a past age that had just ended floated among the islands; and the islands, in all their varying sizes, were too numerous to count. It was almost as if when the world was torn apart, it had become larger; as if the parts became greater than the whole. Spread out between the western islands like huge, gently rounded bobs of glass, was an ocean.

Ned made his way to the stream, washed his face, drank a bit (it tasted slightly of iodine), soaked the urine out of his pants, and then fell asleep beside the rocky bank. He dreamed that he was looking upon the surface of an ocean, which was still as a pond, but he could find no reflection of himself. When he awakened, still unrefreshed, his mouth sticky as if full of burrs, he turned his face to the stream to see his reflection.

It's the same, weak face, he thought, winking at his face wavering in the water. Mercifully, the face winked back. But Ned looked older—his face had lost its smoothness: crow's feet lined his eyes; other wrinkles were barely visible, but they cut across his face from nose to the corners of his mouth.

A ripple washed the image away, but it returned; and as Ned stared at his face, he saw the image of his father. Ned's face had not been used enough, but it had become very like his father's: only the sternness of mouth, deep wrinkles, and receded hairline were needed to make a mature reflection of his father. Ned was the soft stuff from which his father would be molded.

Again, he fell asleep, dreaming of his father and Donatello Toth, wondering if he might wake up in Junction to find that he had been lured by Hell, and just as quickly and easily washed ashore. He dreamed he was trapped inside his father, forced to mime his words to himself.

It was a shallow sleep, for even with eyes closed he was staring into a field of red light. He could shut it out by throwing his arm over his face, by burying his face in the crook of his arm and the hard warm ground, but his dreams would change and he would follow suit by changing position. Although he had never welcomed darkness (even when he was sleeping with Hilda or Sandra), the sun could well become his enemy, a yellow eye always staring, trapping him in an unwanted halo.

Dreams flicked by like frames of a film. He talked and sang to himself. His skin was warmed by the sun. He dreamed of his father—his father praying, walking with his slight limp, praying, chatting with the old men in the "Book-whackers" section of the church, crying without tears, and shouting the words of the Book to him across all the chasms of time, shaking the world with his hoarse voice and Godly words.

And Ned was thrown against the tree.

He awakened with a shout (his father's shout) to find that another island was crashing into his. The other



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

island's surface was about a half-mile below the surface of Ned's island which was rapidly developing hairline cracks as if it had been baked and scorched by the sun.

A crash sent a booming across the rocks. The booming became louder as the island began to break apart.

Ned was on his feet at once, mindlessly running. The ground was shaking, as if in time with a slow metronome. The stone hills broke away from the island and floated beside it. Even as Ned stepped over the cracks, they were widening. He looked down into the darkness below and imagined being crushed between the cold walls of the fissures.

He ran toward the opposite edge of the island, but he could not make it—the land parted, creating tiny stepping-stone islands. He tried jumping across one and almost fell. Clouds wafted past him. As Ned tried to catch his breath, he dreamed that he could take hold of a passing cloud and hide inside it as he was transported back to Junction. An agoraphobic dread took hold of him.

Behind him, the intruding island loomed. Trees and verdant debris hung from a forward wall of rock and soil. The island looked familiar. It looked like green crystal. It reflected the sunlight. And the evergreen rain forest that covered the island was growing, reaching higher and higher.

And the island was drifting closer.

Ned jumped from one stepping-stone island to another, each time looking out into the blue nothingness and hoping that he would not be swallowed by it. He was still fleeing Ahasuerus, still fleeing Taharahnugi's verdant dreams and the mass of souls it contained.

Time could only be subjective here; it was dream-time, and Ahasuerus and Taharahnugi could dream as well as he, could imagine minutes into hours and seconds into days. The sun would never set; there would be endless days. Ned wondered if all these floating islands contained the soul of souls, or were they all just bits of his dreams?

"I won't be a figment of your dream," Ned said aloud, staring ahead, looking to see if there was an end to this dream that contained him. And he remembered what Ahasuerus had said:

". . . *You found little happiness in that world which was built on the dreams of the dead. It was a tiny cosmos of old thoughts. But even then you were dreaming of Hell . . .*"

I've always been trapped, he thought, especially in Junction. He didn't want that dead mythos of tradition, that wormhole in the dream of the soul of souls. Freedom, he thought, dreaming of a place where dreams were made of sleep and could not affect the stuff of the world. This whole world would not complete Ahasuerus's dream, Ned told himself, imagining that the islands were compressed universes and that time was whirling on quickly in these tiny dominions.

Ned watched the terminator of a shadow moving from island to island as a larger island crossed the sun's path above. He felt a sudden chill as shadows enveloped his island. I picked this dream, he told himself as he surveyed the group of shadowed islets that had been Goreme. The islets seemed to be grouping closer together.

Looking out from the shadows, Ned saw something glitter ahead like a needle glistening in the sun. But he could not make it out, and he was afraid to island-skip in the darkness.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He waited, watching faraway islands floating like clouds in blue smoke until the island passed overhead and Ned was momentarily blinded by the sunlight.

He heard a scraping sound behind him. He turned around and squinted his eyes to see Taharahnugi's dream forest drawing closer, pushing the outer steppingstone islands out of the way. Ned imagined that the dark forest island was a huge barnacled fish swimming toward him, intent only on its prey, destroying anything in its path.

He turned to run and saw an island rising ahead, its crystal spires and buildings reflecting sunlight like huge mirrors.

5

He scrambled from islet to islet, running from the green shadow floating behind him. In the grand scheme of things he was an insect crawling from rock to rock, the dream-tuff of Goreme. He scrambled like a spider, jumped like a cricket from dream to dream and prayed he would not be caught in the blue emptiness where only clouds could safely float. He wondered what would happen if he slipped and fell—would he be caught in the blue like the helicopter or would he fall past the islands of the earth until he reached cold darkness?

As he stood on an islet that had once been the site of a hermitage—an inside wall of the dug-out structure was exposed and blind saints and angels stared with fresco eyes into the blue—he calculated his chances of making the jump to the large island before him. He could barely make out its borders; roiling smog and mist muted everything on the island, made it difficult to distinguish one building from another. But the glass skyscrapers reached out of the mist, their windows reflecting the sunlight like the blinking eyes of night-animals trapped in the flashing glare of headlights.

There was quite a distance separating Ned from the island, so he waited, hoping the islet and the island would move cloer to each other. It was as if the rocky islet was a satellite of the island; as if a new moon and planet had been cobbled out of this broken universe. And indeed the islet did seem to be revolving around the island, for Ned watched the opposite shoreland moving slowly by. The wall of buildings was broken in many places—new avenues had been made when buildings crashed and buckled, the broken teeth in the city's smile.

He heard a scraping sound behind him as another islet was pushed aside by Taharahnugi's island. Impatient to bridge the distance between Goreme and New York, he waited for a steppingstone islet to drift by. He scanned the opposite shore, looking for a peninsula or cape that would give him access to the island. A storm was brewing overhead. Shadows danced and clouds gathered as if pulled together by a magnet. Ned watched cloud streamers rise, to be merged into the greyness above where islands drifted like purple stormclouds.

Grey turned to angry electric blue and thunder rolled across that small quadrant of sky. Ned imagined that God's metronome was marking time for the thunderdrums and lightning flashes. It was as if the smog and mist and miasma of New York were being carried by the atmosphere onto every other island nearby until the bits of the world became gritty with ash and dirt. Ned could not see very well; smog turned to darkness and storm.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Heaven boomed and showered lightning sparks upon the dark islands below.

And Ned made out a shape before him, a promentary on the opposite shore.

He jumped, hoping he would find something more tangible than darkness. A flash of lightning lit the island. Ned was hanging onto an outcropping protruding from what had once been the bank of the East River. He crawled from rock to rock, his fingers gouging, pulling at stones, digging into sod, until he reached flat land and stepped across an empty Franklin D. Roosevelt Drive.

Ned found himself on familiar ground, but he had the gnawing sensation that it was the familiar ground of a dream.

Spread out before him was New York City, shimmering in a mantle of smog and mist. It was a dead-gray world of glass and cement, yet Ned could see through, around, and beneath the buildings and streets. An opaque world of walls had suddenly become transparent. But the city was caught in its own time. Cars and trains and people were caught in mid-movement. Wings outspread, a pigeon hovered between buildings. Ned passed the United Nations Building (which had been partially destroyed by the shaking; its green tinged glass was scattered along First Avenue like so many glittering pieces of Heaven), Rockefeller Center, and Saint Bartholomew's Church which had turned into yellow chrysoberyl. Then he meandered around Saint Patrick's Cathedral. The Pan American Building sparkled as if made out of ice, and Ned could even imagine a glass Vertol helicopter readying itself to crash through the glass Heaven above.

Ned glanced at an old woman standing with one foot off the ground and a gnarled hand lifted to touch her face. A little boy who had jumped into the air during a temper tantrum was stuck, as if pinned to the background of buildings and wide avenues. Ned could stare through the streets, see the tracks and trains and subway stations below. The commuters looked like tiny glass figurines placed under a glass topped table.

The world was sealed in amber; only Ned could move about. But the silence of dreams was being replaced by the noise of a living city, an eternal commotion of shrieks and laughter, whispers and epithets, sighs and farts, babies crying and old men croaking. As Ned stepped through the frozen crowds, as if making his way around so many natural obstacles, he realized that it was not the city and its citizens that were transparent, but that he knew every nook and cranny and idea and thought and object in this island world.

Knowledge was somehow being continuously created in his mind. It was as if he was in a room where the lights were always on, where there could be no dark corners.

The world began to whisper in his mind.

Time began winding up and people moved about. Everyone was a thought inside Ned's mind; every action and destination was known. There would be no chance here. Thoughts merged into a steady scream, all the agonies and joys merged in a rush of collective life.

But Ned was caught by his reflection in a mirror beside the entranceway to a building. He looked at his face. It changed into his father's and beamed at him, then melted into the face of Ahasuerus, a wrinkled,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

knowing face, not stylized like the fresco in the stone church.

All the faces are the same, Ned thought, imagining that he was a small chip that contained and reflected the world. His face was only an instant of history. The world was crystalizing into the soul of souls. Ned could run, but he took the world with him. He was a spore, carrying the pattern of every other soul.

He turned away from the mirror, but saw the masks of his face on the people rushing around him. He saw himself, all his guises, as if all the moments of his life had been spliced and scattered, given various forms, and then collected here. He was a collective being seeing all his faces, confounding time, spreading new patterns.

He listened to a familiar lowing inside his head, only to discover that he was shrieking, covering his ears with his palms; and he realized that he was naked in this place, that he could have no walls nor disguises, that the dreaded creatures of his psyche were visible, bathed in the white light of sight.

The voice inside Ned's head was his own, part of his dream and the billions of souls, each a dream inside the soul of souls. Ned searched for an underlying form. But it was not to be found in this glittering city; it was outside, or at the bottom of, his universe.

If I disappeared, would the dream remain? he asked himself. Or am I trapped in a dream, my own mirage?

He had to find the edge of this dream, even if he had to enter another dream, and another after that. He would have to find the *terra incognita* that lay outside the old mythos of the past and the new mythos generated by the soul of souls. He would not yield to Ahsauerus or Taharahnugi, who combined the old mythos with the new in a fusion of souls and dreams.

You are part of the mythos, Ned told himself. You'll infect the world with yourself and still be trapped in your dream.

Ned ran down Fifty-ninth Street. He could see the south-west corner of Central Park: it was overgrown with evergreen trees. Taharahnugi's dreams were already touching this island. Birds grackled in the bush and insects scratched and chirruped.

People passed Ned, ignored him, and he felt like a ghost passing through someone else's dream. He looked into the evergreen forest as if the uniform trees, which were straight and slender, were transparent, as if the flowers were made of blown glass and the mulch and sod and stone below were clear gel. And in the center of the forest was a stone church.

I must get out of here, he thought. There isn't much time. The forest was growing like the mountains in Hell. Seeds sprouted from cracks in the pavement, grew into trees in minutes. Trees lined the streets, then covered them. But the buildings stood above the trees like glass pylons.

Ned was moving west, heading for the boat basin and the edge of the island. The island would soon become rain forest, and he would be trapped again.

Riverside Drive was empty as were the brownstones that stood on either side. Ned quickly passed into the park, walked down a long stone perron, and looked out over mown lawns that seemed to stretch away forever. He passed basketball courts, picnic tables, playgrounds, bicycle paths, a roofed bandstand, stone fountains sur-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rounded by stone benches. Memories appeared in his mind like numbers—he knew everyone who had ever walked here, all the Sunday strollers who had been mugged, chased, raped, murdered, the family picnickers, the lovers, muggers, lonelyhearts, park workers, infants in swaddling clothes, and the children who had played and splashed in the fountains.

Before him, where the Hudson River had once been, was a new landmass, another island of approximately the same size as New York. Behind him, the forest flourished, fed by sun and cement and a blinding storm that roared and spat fire. But the west edge of the island was dry, and the sky above and beyond was clear as glass. Purple-shadowed islands and islets hung in the sky like the pieces of a huge mobile.

Ned looked at the opposite shore and saw the remains of the mountains of Hell which had been smashed when the earth was slapped and pulled apart. But diamond peaks still sparkled and mountains of topaz and spinal sported opal towers and moonstone ridges. In the bright noonday light the world before him was translucent. Shattered mountains had been crushed into diamond shards and lengths of emerald, opal, quartz, and shale created the illusion of tiny cities nestled in a glass country.

To his left, on the north-west coast of the island, drifted a satellite, an islet that had broken off from the larger island. It was a chunk of crystal mountain floating off the mainland and was in the shape of two tetrahedrons stuck together—it turned ever so slightly, reflecting the light like a thousand colored mirrors, a sun made of gems.

Ned stepped across to the other island, slipped on the smooth gem surface, and from a seated position surveyed this new, yet very familiar, universe. This was where Simon had led his marchers; it had been an old dreamland of flitting shapes and inorganic growth. But now it was dead. The mountains had stopped growing, and the face of Hell was bathed in sulight.

He followed a path along the edge of what had once been Helltundra. All around him were broken gemspurs: jasper, sapphire, jacinth, sardius, sardonyx, chalcedony, opal, shale. Now they gathered light from the sun instead of fluoresing in Hell's blanket of darkness. The amber flowers, too, were smashed; they were just shards, colored pieces of glass from the Desert Midland Bank.

He was back in Junction. But how many Junctions exist? he asked himself. Where are Sandra and Hilda and the others? He quickened his step, walked through ivory lowlands. He came upon Bild Bridge, which had not survived the shaking, but the river was a crystal belt of diamond spurs and glacé patterns. Ned crossed it, stepping carefully, but slipping nevertheless. Once on the other side, of the river, he could see Junction Road winding ahead, a cobbled path bordered by crystal pinstars that had once been high grass. It was as if this country had been immersed in the stuff of another reality; and like oil and water, Junction and the stuff of Hell had separated. But Hell had settled over the tundra, high grass, meadows, woods and wastes, commons, lammas lands, and the habitations of Junction folk.

As Ned followed Junction Road, he took a look over his shoulder through a divide of smashed moonstone at the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

island looming behind. He could see the dark green of rainforest. The island was dark; a storm was tearing at it, throwing down a torrent of rain. A few broken buildings still stood out above the forest canopy, but soon they too would fall, he told himself.

He turned and continued along Junction Road, running his hand along the smooth crystal bank that had been formed beside the path.

"Look, over there," shouted Flora Angleton; her strident voice echoed sharply. Miss Jenkens stood stiffly beside her.

"Flora, Miss Jenkens, over here," shouted Ned, happy at the sight of familiar faces, even if they were his old school marm and the daughter of a man who had wished him into Hell.

But they didn't seem to hear him.

"Don't shout," Miss Jenkens said to Flora as she patted her shoulder like a comrade. "You must have respect for adults and angels, and we must tell the others what we've seen."

"Miss Jenkens, wait a minute . . ."

They both disappeared over a rise of spinel before Ned could take a step. Once again the world was quiet, except for the ringing of crystal flowers and pinstars by the gentle ground breezes.

It was as if they did not see me, Ned thought, listening to the crystalline tinkling and the deep ringing that sounded as if someone was rubbing a champagne glass with a wet finger.

Ned followed them, and just as he could see the top of the church in the distance, he saw a crowd below him, closing off the street and standing in the crystal grass. Some of those standing in the grass Ned recognized, but he guessed that they were all Fauboughers. Their clothes were ragged and torn, as the glass flora was as sharp as knives. Hands had been bloodied when the Fauboughers had made their way through no-man's land; and the faces, arms, legs, and hands of women and children who had followed their menfolk were similarly bloodied.

The crowd parted as Ned approached them. A child with a wild brown face fell as he stepped from the path into the gemspurs; he stood up quickly, as if the cold ground would swallow him, and he bled from a slash that ran the length of his belly.

"What are you Fauboughers doing here?" Ned asked, stopping before them. "Where are the townspeople?" But the Fauboughers just bowed their heads and made holy signs. "What of the rest of your people, those who followed the featherwakers into Hell? Those that scourged themselves with the bit? Did they return?"

"No one returned," said a man in a thick Faubougher accent. He stepped out from the crowd onto the path. He was tall and thin and well muscled; his arms and torso were covered with old slash-scars, and he wore only rough trousers belted with frayed rope. A woman stepped out beside him; she was thin and although she wore her sandy hair long, she was partially bald.

"I remember you," Ned said to the man and woman. "You were both standing on Bild Bridge the night the marchers ran into Hell. Then you didn't go."

The man winced and said, "Then you can see everything." The crowd muttered, seemed to take on a different shape, as the Fauboughers crossed themselves with inturned hands forming the holy vee.

"Where are the townspeople?" Ned asked.

"Waiting for you in and around the



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

church."

"Why?"

"To complete their dream, I suppose," said the man, his hands by his side and fingers forming the holy vee.

"What dream do they wish to complete?" Ned asked.

"Why, the dream that begins here, the dream most everyone had before Ned Wheeler left to find you—they dreamed that you would hold court and decide the Last Days in a church made of gems."

"But I'm Ned Wheeler." Ned walked toward the man he had been speaking to, but the man backed away in fear.

"Why are you afraid of me?" asked Ned. "Stand still," and the man stood before him, shaking as if he was faced with the angel of death. The crowd retreated, leaving Ned and the Faubougher alone. "I'm Ned Wheeler. Look at me."

And Ned saw two tiny images of a birdbeast reflected in the Faubougher's eyes. The beast was covered with eyes and its six pissyellow wings were slowly beating.

So I've returned to complete the dream they had before I left, Ned thought. "Did you dream of the court of the Last Days?" he asked the Faubougher.

"No," whispered the Faubougher, as if ashamed. "Only those who dreamed of the holy court remained in Junction, the rest followed the featherwakers. Except my wife and me."

Ned passed through the crowd like a wraith and walked toward Junction-proper. The path widened into a cobbled street flanked by high crystal walls that had been part of the mountains of Hell. Flowers were frozen beneath the translucent ground which reflected the calm sky overhead. He could hear the clickclatter of Faubougher's footsteps behind him; they kept a safe distance.

Ned felt as if he was passing into the earth, for the street cut deeper and deeper into the clear rock; he could almost imagine that he was back in the tunnel with Deacon. The chatter of the Faubougher echoed along the high walls—it was the coughing and gutteral croakings of the Faubougher tongue, a dialect that was not pleasing to Ned's ears, perhaps because it reminded him of the street patois of New York.

As he neared the north-west edge of Junction Park, its glassy surface now smooth as an ice rink, the walls of the translucent canyon on either side of him became lower until they were even with the cobbled street. He looked diagonally across the park at the Congress Bar; it was layered with beryl and opal climbers that looked like sparkling ivy. The stocks platform in the center of the park was barely visible as it was encased in a block of smoky rose quartz, and the church across the street from the Congress Bar seemed to be covered with the same stuff. The church and bar looked like two great glassy creatures staring at each other. In an eternity they might draw icy breaths and continue their lives in slow-time.

A great crowd had gathered in the park and around the church. Penitents stood quietly awaiting news of the Last Days like husbands worrying out a childbirth. Ned's father and Reverend Surface stood beside the main entrance to the church with Reverends Blues, Briar, Shorter, and MacDonald beside them.

A buzzing rose from the park and its surrounds as folk lowered their heads and prayed on their fingers, waving and making holy signs—it was



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

truly a holy day and once again Ned was in its center. Everyone was waiting for Ned to make a move. He looked around, and then walked through the crowd to his father.

"Welcome, holy angel," said his father, echoed by the priests and the crowd that was drawing closer. "As was our vision, so is the church prepared."

Reverend Surface and Ned's father stepped aside, opening the way for Ned to enter the roseate church. Curious, he stepped between them (he would speak with his father later) and recognized the faded, stylized portrait of the emperor Genetos in the narthex entrance hall. Inside, the church was identical to the one in Goreme, authentic in every detail, from the designs that covered walls and ceiling to the frescoes of the celestial hierarchy.

From an arch above him Ahasuerus mouthed a sermon to an invisible multitude of ghosts flitting and drifting in the cool air of the church.

And a smooth, thin tentacle curled around Ned's leg. He pulled away, but another caught him by the wrist. Screaming, he backed away from the church until his pinions were torn loose.

"Get away from here," he shouted to his father, Reverend Surface, and the crowds. "It's a ruse. Turn back."

The crowd parted for Ned, but Reverend Surface had already stepped into the narthex, his face awash in God's light. As the smooth tentacles wrapped around his neck, Ned's father followed.

"Pull away," Ned shouted, but his voice was lost, soaked up by the crowd. As he started after his father, the arms of the church were extruded from the narthex entrance like meat passed through a heavenly sieve—a tentacle for every citizen, every soul. The crowds swept past him.

Ned could not help his father now.

He saw Sandra (she had cut her hair and blackened her face with ashes) and shouted to her. She turned to him, and Ned thought he could detect a glimmer of recognition.

"It's me, Ned," he shouted above the din of the crowd.

But Sandra shouted, tore her hair, rended her over-shirt, and screamed, "The angel sends me to God." With that she pushed her way forward until a tentacle caught her by the neck.

"No," Ned shouted, railing at Ahasuerus. "No, even now, no. I am not connected." And he thought he heard Taharahnugi in the background noise of the crowd. But it was another ruse to trap him, to divert his attention so he could be reeled into the church and kneaded into the other souls.

Tentacles snaked toward him, writhing forward soundlessly, quickly . . .

Ned ran, the tentacles close behind him. The air was heavy with ghosts and shadowy shapes: the congregation of the soul of souls. Angels flicked past him, turned in the air; and the glassy residue of Hell reflected the clouds scudding past in the heavens above.

He outran the tentacles. They tangled together, became vines and forest, an evergreen forest wall behind him, a thousand trees growing glassy leaves, reflecting the noonday sun.

When he reached the edge of the island, he stepped onto another—another island large as Junction: he would leave Junction to Taharahnugi and Ahasuerus. Let them merge their dreams, he thought.

But he found himself in another



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Junction; and before him, an island away, was another Junction, this one smoothed over by Hell as if with a lathe, a city made of glass, where shops had become jeweled palaces and the streets rang with sharp music when citizens strolled along the mirror streets.

*"All the possibilities exist, all the worlds are possible . . ."*

Memory was a cruel voice ringing in his ears, for it was the sound of wind rushing through grass . . .

Ned looked around, sniffed at the air, felt a sudden stab of nostalgia, and found a catweed to chew on. The milky weed had a familiar, bitter taste. And the cobblestones of Junction Road turned into butterflies that circled in the air. In the scrub below him, butterflies burst into flowers.

Here is a place where Hell holds sway, Ned thought as he looked into the blue, searched out the floating islands ahead, wondered; and he remembered mountains growing in Hell, children playing in Helltundra, Simon the Featherwaker lecturing him about the will of God. The air smelled like morning, and there was dew on the grass. This might be a new world, he thought, a world untouched by the ruses of time and still awaiting its Last Days. But it was also a world left indeterminate by the tides of Hell.

Perhaps this Junction was made of the same stuff of Hell. Maybe nothing was predictable: water could crack, the sun might be black or it might become a golden insect sucking up the world, peeing green lettuce, saturating the world in vegetable rain. But the sun was bright and yellow, and the fragments of the world floated in the sky. Shadows rolled over islets and storms broke silently over distant lands.

Ned heard someone shout in the tundra and walked through the high grass to investigate. A whore's daughter, blond and buck-teethed, hiked up her skirt for Handler, Small Henry's youngest son, who was shouting, "Bugs, bugs, it's probably full of bugs."

Ferris Angleton's daughter, Flora, joined him immediately, shouting, "Bugs, bugs, I see the bugs."

The little girl pulled down her skirt and then started to laugh. She walked toward Handler, swinging her hips in an exaggerated fashion, and then grabbed for his crotch, screaming, "I've got the worm."

Handler blushed and Flora lifted up her dress to prance around singing, "I've got a worm and it's bigger than his, it's bigger than his, it's bigger . . ."

"Listen to them," said Forester who stood behind Ned, his hands on his hips like a washerwoman surveying her rags hanging on the line to dry. He wore a carycoat and overhood and a blood-purple chasuble that looked to be soaked with sweat. "They'll fall of the edge of the world if they play there."

He's right, Ned thought, once he was over his surprise at seeing Forester, or his doppleganger. The Helltundra dropped sharply into the blue; and the children were playing on the headland's edge, baiting each other and fate.

There was a curious *pop* and Small Handler disappeared.

"Get out of there," Forester shouted at the children. "I've told them not to play there," he said to Ned. "And just what are you doing here? Pissing away God's time while your son Donatello carouses with the whores in Congress. A fine thing for an eight year old boy."



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was another *pop* and a large scorpion replaced Flora, began climbing out of the tundra toward the high grass. It winked at him and composed a tune:

*Back and side, go bare, go bare*
*Both hand and foot go cold,*
*But belly, God sent you good ale enough*
*Whether it be new or old.*

There was another *pop* and the scorpion disappeared.

This might be the place to make a stand, Ned thought as he watched a blade of grass explode with a yellow spark and become a grasshopper, which then jumped, popped, and turned into a swallowtail heading for Heaven. Perhaps I could mold this stuff of change, turn it to my advantage . . .

"Everything changes here," Ned said to Forester, but he lifted his voice as if asking a question.

"Well, of course it does," Forester said. "God changes the substance of the world so we might not become too certain of his grand design."

"That's from the Book?"

"Of course."

Once again, Ned felt the eddies of time, felt time swirl about him like the chill morning breezes. Here the winds were constantly blowing, dredging up the detritus and dreams of the past, pulling in the shadows of the future. But this was a sunny eternal day, and shadows could only be grey shapes damped by God's bright light.

"Have you seen Sandra?" Ned asked. Surely this world was also a dream, a figment of the soul of souls; but perhaps Ned could become a colonial in this fresh country that was as capricious as Hell itself. He might be able to learn the workings of this world; if not, there would be other islands. He imagined a continuum of worlds, an infinity of islands that ranged from the determinist clockwork visions of Junctions's clergy to the shores of Hell.

"I know no Sandra," Forester said. "Have you done with Hilda and Ingrid?"

"What about Ingrid?"

"Why, she followed Baldanger into Hell. At least that's what everyone dreamed." Forester sucked in his cheeks as if to taste the insides of his mouth.

The island shuddered as another island scraped against its north edge; another pushed against its east edge, and a mist seemed to be pouring from an easterly direction, bringing chill and dampness like miasmas floating off the Stickveiller Bogs.

The island rumbled, shook (Ned imagined that everything went out of focus for an instant), and Forester fell forward. "Damn," he said, rubbing his knee. "Look there, you see, God is piecing the world together again."

Ned looked around, saw that the islands drifting nearby were all forest green. The islands were converging; islets and islands smashed against each other, hooked vines, as new forests bloomed with the passing of every second. The islands were like clouds uniting for a storm. All the islands will soon be forests, Ned thought.

"I think I shall write another chapter of the Book," Forester said. "And I shall call it 'The Gathering.' Do you like that? And God gathered up the islands, just as he gathered his peoples and . . ." Forester's voice trailed off as he lost himself in his schemes, oblivious to the world changing around him.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The world will mend, Ned thought, become as it was before the shaking: cracks will fuse together, crystal surfaces will melt. But the world will still be a dream, and the dream a thought. He dreamed of Ahasuerus who was dreaming Taharahnugi who was dreaming forests, an infinity of narrow boles, triple canopies of dark-green leaves, forests that were so uniform that one might think that the world was turning into a laurel garden, a tidy world without creepers, rotting vegetation, and undergrowth.

And he ran toward the west, toward the islands and islets ahead, toward the electric blue sky filled with clouds.

Behind him, the forest islands were converging into a single landmass as if all the possibilities were being fused into one dream.

NED RAN from islet to islet, and the islands led a path through the sky. The clouds were motionless, like ships caught on a mirror sea without a breeze.

Where is there to run? Ned asked himself. And why run, why not wait out the inevitable? Why not let Ahasuerus find me as he certainly will?

*No*, Ned said to himself as he stood on an islet shaped like a hand with broken fingers. He stared at a landmass ahead, another Junction, and another junction after that. "No," he shouted at Ahasuerus. "I'm still separate." But his shouts were soaked up by the void.

Perhaps the dreams can't be merged without me, he thought. Perhaps I can confound the soul of souls. There must be an end to this, he told himself; but it was not one he could find, for the world was too large, there were too many islets and islands. He could not cross the miles on foot, although time was behind him like a friendly breath. Time could crumple space, just as it could crumble Ahasuerus's new world.

He kept moving from islet to islet and islet to island, and it was as if time had stopped and space became narrowed. Clouds covered the sky, making his way darker; it was as if he had entered a country of twilight. Rocks, debris, islets, and islands hung motionless in the sky; and here and there sunlight played through a hole in the cloud cover. Ned had the sensation that he was inside a cylinder, a kaleidoscope that could only reflect grey forms.

But in the distance the grey shaded into a black band, a night-horizon. If Ned could get closer, he was sure that he would be able to see the stars—or would they just be sparks in Ahasuerus's dream?

He walked slowly, hopelessly, but he would not give in, would not accede to the dream of the soul of souls, even if he had always been a part of it and could not escape it. He was a mirage drifting through mirages.

Many of the islands were inhabited, and Ned spoke to various persons, many of whom could not understand his tongue, or ignored him, or didn't even see him. He was a wraith, a ghost flitting like all the other ghosts he had seen, except he carried his own weight, dragged it about like a bird with broken wings. He saw women who resembled Sandra and Ingrid and Hilda, but they were odd copies and did not recognize him. He felt as if he was disappearing, as if every step was bringing him closer to dissolution, as if any second he would discover that his physical self had fallen away into the void, leaving a naked being to float from island to is-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

land; a dustdevil caught in the wind.

He wondered if he was dead, a ghost that could not rest.

The dark band ahead seemed to widen. Perhaps the band is moving closer to me, he thought as he stepped onto an island that looked as if it had been slapped by God's fist and then burned. Twisted metal and glass were everywhere; not a building was left standing. It appeared that no one was alive here. Ned crossed the island as quickly as he could, but the wind whistled under the debris, creating melodies and almost-words that sounded like the tinnitus of thought. He imagined that he was hearing a familiar song.

As he neared the jagged west edge of the island, he looked behind, for he felt a pressure on the back of his neck as if someone was staring at him. And he saw a huge landmass filling the sky. He screamed, terrified that the continent would fall upon him, swallow him. It was Taharahnugi's dream-forest; but the world was not completely formed, the dreams not yet melded, for the islands that stretched ahead of Ned had not been taken over by the same dream.

Ned ran and shouted and railed at Ahasuerus and Taharahnugi and the universe.

He found an islet pocked with tiny craters and covered with dust; he imagined that he was walking across some mysterious feature of the man-in-the-moon, and he supposed that the moon had also been smashed.

Then he came upon an island populated with people who dressed like New Yorkers but spoke in a rasping tongue characterized by glottal clicks. Ned took to cobbled streets, became lost, and finally found his way out of the dirty, smog-laden town after walking in circles. The town was built upon several steep hills, and it must have been very old as it boasted several thick city walls and might be easily defended, providing the imagined invading army did not have modern weapons.

As Ned neared the island's edge, a sandy, rocky beach, he saw an old windmill. It's great blades slowly turned, and Ned fancied that it was a propeller driving the island on its uncharted course.

He walked as if on a forced march. A dead man running from the hounds of Heaven, he thought, remembering the Book; but Ned was no closer to conversion than when his father had trapped him in the church with holy words and threats.

Taharahnugi's dream-forest filled the sky behind him, drawing islands and islets like a magnet. It was advancing slowly, turning the world into a single thought. But Ned was too tired to run; his terror had ebbed, and he quickened his steps and hoped for death, for he could not hope to outrun the dreams. A storm raged ahead, and the heavens looked like a madman's chiaroscuro painting of clouds boiling over a calm sea.

The band of darkness became thicker; its center was black and its edges shaded off into grey.

And Ned walked toward the dark horizon, approached what might be a crack in the dreams, a place where there was no overlap. He felt dizzy, as if he was looking downward from some great height.

Dreams confounded time and distance. Ned had no idea how far he had come, nor how long it had taken. He crossed one island to another, but the islands were spaced closely together, as if contained by the boundaries of Ahasuerus's dreams.

The air became thin and cold. Ned



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shivered, but continued on. Rocks floated above, casting pale irregular shadows that crawled harmlessly over the ground. Finally, through clouds and mist, Ned made out two cat's eye stars that blinked as if some imaginary starbeast had just awakened.

The band of darkness loomed ahead; with every step Ned took, it became wider and higher.

A grinding noise cut across the surface of the island Ned was crossing as islets and islands came together. He ran, skipped, scrabbled from islet to island.

He could see the crack in the dreams.

Stars blinked above curls of atmosphere.

Behind him, the world was a wall of forest green. He turned to look at it, imagined that it was a huge wave cresting, about to crush him, drown him in Taharahnugi's dream; and he ran toward the darkness ahead, toward the stars and the limits of the dreams. He could feel the deadly mass of souls behind him, around him, pressing forward to grind him into the soul of souls.

"No," he shouted as he ran, as he jumped from island to islet. His head was pounding; he was seeing as if through a bloody haze. "Let me go."

And everything exploded into thought around him.

Dreams had overtaken him. Now they would overwhelm him.

"*Give up,*" shouted the rocks. "*Give up,*" sang the wind, "*Give up,*" echoed the blue-grey air, and the clouds rained words: "*Giveupgiveupgiveupgiveupgiveupgiveupgiveup.*"

Islands and islets, dust and debris, rocks and clouds were becoming conscious, turning into souls, converging upon Ned. Souls were leaching away his life, tugging at him, passing through him, catching him, drawing him back into the warmth of a single thought, bathing him in the bright light of common sight.

But his only thought was a scream of agony.

"*Let them in,*" cried Ahasuerus. "*You've come to the end of the world. There's no place left to run. You're caught, accept it.*"

Souls were pumping Ned dry, making him invisible.

"*Merge the dreams,*" said Taharahnugi.

"No," Ned whispered, trying to shut out the wash of sound bubbling, crackling, cackling, whistling, hissing inside his head. "I won't be a figment of your dreams." He took a step, carried the dead weight of a thousand souls that were feeding on him; but sleep and dreams were overtaking him.

I'm lost, he thought, willing his eyes to remain open. He looked at the starlit islands drifting ahead. And I'm so close. He took another step. He was buried under a mass of souls. His shouts were muffled, lost in dreams. He took another step . . .

And he stepped off the edge of the world toward the stars, into the crack between dreams. The souls fell from him like rags.

He fell, regretting death, gagging on fear.

He saw the stars spread across a diamond vendor's velvet.

He was frozen in the icy depths of Hell.

He had confounded time. It was whirling too quickly for him to speak, too slowly for thought.

Then the stars blinked out, and Ned was wrapped in the heavy folds of darkness. But his shouts became long colored streamers, and he could think; it was as if once again time was



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a river carrying him forward toward unknown destinations.

So this is death, he thought. But it was not as he had expected; his life had not passed before him, rather it was blanked out, day by day, year by year, like the stars.

Darkness was a substance. Ned found himself falling, then swimming, then walking through it, breathing its miasma, pushing through it as if through viscid syrup.

The dreams haven't merged, he told himself. He was alone, pushing through death's reaches, looking for a break in the darkness. All was silent, but a dim grey light began to permeate the layers of darkness, exposing a twilight world. Ned imagined he was walking through regions that had never felt strong sunlight nor known human life.

But there was life here, bursting all around him in silent agonies of birth and death. Shapes bled into one another. The ground shifted. Luminescent mountains banded the horizon. Smooth ice shapes and gem faces were slowly melting as they pushed higher into a black starless sky; but Ned could not be sure of what he saw, for Hell was a specious solidity, a palimpsest of shifting illusions. Ned could not keep anything in focus for more than a few seconds. It seemed that the mountains were subtly degrading; yet when Ned blinked his eyes, or shifted his attention, everything would be built up and solid once again—for a few seconds. It was as if Hell was remaking itself, remaining pliable until by trial and error or divine wish it could find a proper reality.

Could this be what my mother saw when she stepped into Hell? Ned asked himself.

The mountains grew as he walked. Diamond peaks sparkled and cut into an empty sky while crests of tourmaline and chrysoprase rose beside crystal alps. Mountains of topaz and spinal sported opa, towers and moonstone ridges; ivory lowlands sprouted amber flowers. And Ned could see, if he looked out of the corner of his eye, small fluorescing gem-spurs growing out of the ground nearby. The floor of Hell was bursting with inorganic life.

Ned found the edge of Hell. It was a wall of searing bright light, as if a hundred years of afternoon sunlight were pushing against Hell's dominions. But Hell soaked up the light as it did sound; and Ned was several steps into this bright region, almost out of the dead clutch of Hell, before he felt its impact. For in instant, he was blinded. He felt as if the sun had exploded inside his head. Then, by degrees, he could see, but it was as if he was looking through a fish-eye lens: he saw the scrub and rock and pebble of tundraland rising into a knoll, flattening out, then rising again to be met by Junction's grassy plains. Ned was sure he was looking at Bridgehead, but this time he was looking out of Hell.

A figure stood in the tall grass. Try as he might, Ned could not bring it into focus. He walked on, but it was hard going. Every step seemed an eternity; distance seemed to be meaningless, yet when he turned his head he saw that the mountains were now behind him.

Ned was pushing into an invisible barrier. He imagined that the hands of Hell were holding him back. But he was so close. Just a few steps more . . .

He pressed toward the greyness of the tundra. A country of clouds shadowed the sun, draining the land-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

scape of color, leaving only ash to be dissolved in bright light. Better to be turned into ash than into a dream, he thought, pressing, pushing at the invisible membrane that divided the two realities of Junction and Hell.

Without a sound, he pushed through Hell into Junction—found himself standing upon firm tundra, drawing deep breaths, blinking at the sky. Before him was grass; beyond was Junction, still the same, prim, pretty, full of foul smells and fine citizens. Today it was a bit noisier than other days; only a thin whisper reached Ned, a grumble. The Desert Midland Bank reflected the afternoon sun like a nightbeacon flaring for sailing ships and shamelessly showed Junction's teeth to the creatures of Hell.

Perhaps I'll be safe here, Ned thought, looking at this familiar world. It was whole, unbroken by forest dreams and islands.

Once again, he espied the figure that had been watching him: it was a boy who had been chewing on a milky weed. The boy's mouth was open as if to form a scream, and the weed was falling to the ground. The boy was overweight and his face was soft and familiarly average. He had long blond hair that stuck to the sides of his face, small teeth set in a large jaw, a rather large, sensual mouth, and dark blue eyes that Ned knew would lighten to cerulean after the boy ate or made love.

Ned was watching a younger, more innocent version of himself; he was staring at his doppleganger. He imagined that he knew what the boy was thinking, for once he had had the same thoughts himsellf. He understood that he had entered a speculatory world, and he wondered if his mother might be alive in this alternate Junction; perhaps he would find her sweeping the porch, sewing his father's shirt, or kneeling in church.

Ned shouted at his doppleganger, but the boy had closed his eyes and was screaming. Ned remembered when he had first seen Deacon in the guise of the birdbeast.

There could be no merging, Ned thought, for every thought split the world; and he imagined the alternative pasts, the might-have-beens, distant presents, all the equally real worlds of the future. He turned toward Hell; it was a familiar ocean where shapes swam like thoughts. Where is Ahasuerus? he asked himself. Perhaps this world has no Ahasuerus, no New York, Ingrid, Deacon, nor Taharahnugi. No soul of souls, he thought.

He shouted to the boy again, and the boy ran . . .

And Ned followed, peering out of one dream into another like a creature made of eyes.

Behind him, something green glittered among the roiling shapes of Hell.

—JACK DANN

**ON SALE NOW IN AMAZING (JULY)**

**THE LONG FALL** by **A. BERTRAM CHANDLER; ODDS** by **CHRISTOPHER ANVIL, SOCIAL BLUNDER** by **TOM GODWIN, SURVIVAL CHARACTERISTIC** by **CHARLES V. DE VET, BEULAH** by **TALMADGE POWELL, SPECTATOR SPORT** by **STEVEN UTLEY, NOBODY HOME,** a complete **NEW SHORT NOVEL,** by **F. M. BUSBY** and many new features.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Perhaps," the Prince conceded shortly. "I never have understood that sort of thing."

"The giving . . . such a little thing."

The Prince snorted his contempt from the doorway. "Even if I were a man, I'd call you a fool."

"Aye, Prince," she answered, and she was no longer a girl. "But if you were a fool, you'd be a man."

He inclined his head with an old-fashioned courtesy. "Well, Faerie Queen: your world and welcome to it. Oh, don't get up. I'll let myself out."

THE HOUSE was drab and dirty as the day she had come to it, unchanged in any way except that Marty was gone. But she was alive, and it was her house, and she knew what to do with it now.

His house in my hands, she thought, and his son beneath my heart. Well now! A new broom and a bucket, a brush and paint, and new curtains to be made and the kitchen to be cleaned and the lawn mowed and his garden started and . . . and what sit you here for, Mistress Finnigan, when there's your toil waiting. Just you wait, Marty, and *then* say I can give you nothing that's real . . . and, oh saints, saints, saints, I'm about to be *sick* again!

SHE SWEPT and she scrubbed. She chipped and painted. She measured and she sewed. She mowed and raked until, little by little, under blistered hands that now wove no magic but her love, Finnigan's Hearth began to shine once more. She was sick in the mornings with depressing regularity but weathered it with choking curses and went about her work. The spring wind was a bouquet of moselle in her nostrils, and ancient Poobah no longer growled when she passed.

But the days went by and she found what it was to be lonely.

One afternoon, as she was rooting weeds out of the new flower bed, she heard someone call her name. Looking up, she saw a tall, white-haired man standing near the front steps. He seemed familiar but the name escaped her.

"Well, top of the morning, Mrs. Finnigan."

"And the rest of the day for yourself," she responded cordially. "What be you? An insurance peddler?"

"Good heavens, no," he laughed gently. "There's nothing sure in this world. No, I was in the area and I just thought I'd look in. I wondered if you'd found what you were looking for?"

Isolde knew him now. She curtsied in deep respect. "Sure, I forgot the face and the name. Give you good day, Angel. And how be the Blessed?"

"Tolerably well," he nodded. "You too, by your blossoming aspect. Did you find your Secret?"

Isolde wiped the perspiration from her face, leaving it streaked with brown earth. "Not all, but as much as my poor thick skull can hold."

"That's all anyone can do. Tell me, then: what is it?"

"To keep from hurt the heart of Marty Finnigan, to love him with my own, and to give to him all the days of my life."

"Well, now," the Angel stepped back, regarding her with his kind, sad eyes. "As nicely as I've ever heard it put. Different hearts, different words, but it dresses out about the same."

"Aye, but I learned too late. He's forgot me."

"Yes, I know," said the Angel. "Your finest hour, as that Englishman



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said. Well, as a woman, you're going to learn that men are very forgetful anyway. It's all a question of what they forget." He indicated the flower bed. "What have you planted?"

"Roses," she said with some enthusiasm. "Marty said when the spring came . . ." the sentence trailed off. "They'll grace the look of the house," she finished, hearing the loneliness in her own voice.

"They will," the Angel said. "I wish you could send me one. But then I never sent you a wedding gift, did I? That just shows you: forgetful, every one of us. Well, let me think. What would be appropriate?" He considered the problem. "How about a new harp?"

And play it to an empty house, she thought.

"Yes," the Angel nodded, pleased with his choice. "A harp. A forgotten art, these days, but you always did have a talent for it." He took her hands in his. "Goodbye for the time, Isolde. We'll meet again, of course."

"'Twill be my pleasure, Angel."

"Yes—well—next time, *do* plan to stay." He waved to her and disappeared around the corner of the house. Isolde went back to her digging.

A few minutes later a car turned into the lane. It was a police cruiser, manned by two bored officers and bearing a battered passenger in the rear seat. The policemen helped their charge from the car with the care one accords to a cracked Ming vase.

Isolde's heart came up into her throat. She clutched at her trowel as if it were the O'Gowra broom.

The officer gave her a weary, patient nod. "This your husband, M'am?"

"Oh, for sure," she swallowed. "Whatever's happened to him?"

Marty's left eye was swollen shut in a small mound of royal purple. The other was bloodshot. He was unshaven, unwashed, and the remains of his suit were only memorials to an epic struggle.

"Who did this?" Isolde snapped. "Who *dast* do this to Martin Finnigan?"

The officer gave Marty a look of professional compassion. "Couldn't tell you all of 'em. Had complaints on him all week. Drunk and disorderly, damage to property, assault, four fights in three days—"

"Oh, dear God! Four?"

"Yes, Ma'am. He must've lost them all. Had him down at the station for two days, drying him out. He wouldn't tell us where he lived." He swung away toward the car. Marty sagged down onto the front stoop, as bleakly silent as Stonehenge. The second policeman regarded him.

"You know, lady," he said, "I think your husband's one of those people who just can't drink."

The first officer returned with something under his arm. He proffered it to Marty, puzzled. "This yours, Mr. Finnigan?"

Marty's one good eye appraised the object, an ancient harp. "Hell, no," he concluded gloomily. "What would I do with it?"

The policeman handed it to Isolde. Her arms and fingers remembered its curve. "Well, it ain't ours, either, so you take it. Alright, Ma'am, I guess that's all. Keep him home for awhile."

"My thanks, Sir."

The police car rumbled out of the lane, leaving them alone in their world. Isolde took a deep, tired breath. There were so many things to tell him . . . about the house and the missing of himself for days . . . about the lonely expanse of bed at night-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

. . . about the child.

But no: a little at a time. I'll not tell him; I'll show him, a little at a time that what we have is real.

"Well, Marty?"

"Well, what?" he muttered. "Don't think I wanted to come back here. They made me come back."

Isolde fought against the anger, but it rose in her throat. "And—and so you'll be walking off again."

"Yes." Marty's voice was hoarse with fatigue. "But I wouldn't mind an asprin or two, if we have any."

"'We', Finnigan? 'We' have nothing. *I* might have a draught to soothe your head." *There's nothing but to fight him. A little of him must be fought and beaten so all of him can win.* "But when you walk down that road, Finnigan, what pill will you take against the next woman that comes your way and loves you, but, pity her soul, isn't good enough, isn't real enough, isn't perfect enough for you?"

"Don't hand me that, damn it!" Marty lunged up at her. "You know what you are. You're a lie, an illusion," he seethed, "standing there telling me *I* don't have any guts. Telling a real person—"

"*Real!*" She jabbed a finger into his chest. "I am the realest, strongest clout of woman 'twill ever be your good fortune to look on, and, I might add, getting realer by the moment, as time and the sight of your eyes will unfold to your feeble understanding. See!" Isolde spread her hands before his face. "Those be blisters. That be callous. And do you puzzle where I got them? From work. From cleaning and painting the house that's mine now, because I stayed to care for it, whilst you walked away. And this sweat—" she was almost crying now "—is from loving your own dream enough to plant your bloody roses!"

His face cracked in the beginnings of a sardonic grin. "Looks like you used your nose to dig with."

"Does it indeed?" The nose in point was thrust as close as possible to him. "A minute at a glass will tell you you've not exactly the look of a rose yourself, Sir Finnigan. And was I blindfold with only this poor nose to tell me what I was next to, my first thought would not be any kind of flower. God, what a sorry sight you are, and yourself unwashed as a Cornish cowherd. *Crawling* home after days—"

"I did not *crawl* home," Marty bawled. "I am not staying."

"Then crawl away!"

"Don't tell me what to do in my own yard."

"*My* yard!" Isolde dropped the trowel, jabbed her fist into his stomach and kicked him in the shin. Marty doubled for a second in surprise, then grabbed at her, tucked her under one arm and spanked her until they swayed and fell onto the grass. She twisted on her back and looked up at him. Marty was very pale, but laughing. "Ah-h, hell. You're right, where else is there?"

"Marty," she said with the anger gone out of her, "will you go? Or do you come home to stay?"

"To stay." He seemed to consider it. "I think I came home to die. Honey, *please*, do we have any asprin?"

She couldn't bear it any longer. Her arms were around him and she was sobbing. "Stay . . . stay. Please stay."

"Sure," he soothed her. "I have to. The world isn't ready for you yet, baby."

"Oh, Marty, that be finished and dead, I swear."

"Now listen," he said painfully as if

(cont. on page 131)



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

*Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to* According to You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.*

Dear Ted,

For the next unspecified time period the National Fantasy Fan Federation is offering curious SF readers a special "Tufer Deal." The idea is that anyone who may be interested in finding out more about the N3F can send in $1 and receive a copy of *The National Fantasy Fan*, our official organ, news and information publication, and *Tightbeam*, our article and opinion, letterhack's delight fanzine.

It is not necessary to join the N3F. All that need be done is to send $1 to:

Janie Lamb, Route 1, Box 364, Heiskell, TN 33754.

She will forward all names and addresses to our fanpublishers and they will mail copies.

That's all it takes. Not very complicated. And it saves us much time and effort with running off membership forms and distributing them on freebie tables at all those conventions. Thank you.

JOHN ROBINSON
1-101st St.
Troy, N.Y. 12180

*Although the N3F has been the butt of many jokes in fandom over its more than 35 years of existence—most of them centering around the N3F's insularity and the tendency of some of its members to regard the organization as the* ne plus ultra *of fandom—I'll pass along your message to our readers here so that they can investigate its present status for themselves. The offer looks like a fair one; a buck doesn't buy as much now as it once did.*—TW

Dear Mr. White:

I don't usually write to people who don't answer letters but a story in your February 1977 issue of FANTASTIC was so far and away the best piece of fantasy I had read in many moons. The story was "Judas Goat" by Brian Stableford. I can't heap enough praise on it. I don't know if Stableford is aware of it or not but his Jack Queen King (and band) resemble, almost unnaturlly so, a real life group. Their music is also downbeat, very realistic, nasty and cynical. A popular band and a very cohesive band, these guys haven't been nicknamed "The Kings Of Heavy Metal" for nothing. The group is called Black Sabbath. Their nasty realism can be seen in such songs as "Paranoid", "Electric Funeral", "Hand Of Doom", "Black Sabbath", "Killing Yourself To Live" and others. Rarely do they ever have an upbeat song. They are popular but they are not bubblegum nor pop and their albums will never reach the top ten. "Hand of Doom" was so nasty and realistic that it was banned on many



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

radio stations in England (I don't know, that's what they claim). I don't know if Stableford even knows of this group or if he hates rock and this is his answer to it; maybe he likes it or is indifferent to it. Anyway it was one hell of a story.

M. LOUIS BAUMGART
1695 Perry Lake Road
Ortonville, MI 48462

Dear Ted,

First, the December 1975 FANTASTIC publishes the "first appearance in the English language" of "Sisyphus, Son of Aeolus" two years after its appearance in Franz Rottensteiner's *View from Another Shore*.

Now "Judas Story" a year and a half after its publication in *The Year's Best Horror Stories: Series III* (DAW Book No. 155).

The first I can understand—the anthology was relatively unknown—but the second?

I think Stableford pulled a fast one.

UNSIGNED POSTCARD
Postmarked Newark, N.J.

*In both cases the fault may be ours, although inadvertant. We had "Sisyphus" in our inventory for at least a year prior to publication (although its translator never mentioned the anthology sale to us, from the chronology you supply I suspect he made the sale to Rottensteiner first), and Stableford's story for a much longer period of time. I should have caught its appearance in the DAW book before scheduling it here. In any case Stableford is blameless. (By the way, this isn't your first communication to us via an unsigned postcard; why not sign your name some time?)*—TW

Dear Editor,

I feel I must respond to de Camp's "White Wizard in Tweeds."

If we take Bertrand Russell's "Why I Am Not a Christian" as a sort of paradigm of rationalistic criticism of Christianity, it would be to our benefit to keep in mind the restrictions which Russell placed on it. It was criticism of a "vague" sort of Christianity, which is common and which infects our society, rather than the "full blooded" acceptance of "a whole collection of creeds which were set out with great precision, and every single syllable of those creeds you believed with the whole strength of your convictions." Furthermore, Russell was much too intelligent to believe that he could disprove the existence of God; he could only prove that the existence of God was not susceptable to rational proof. To Russell it was extremely unlikely—improbable—that God—any God—should exist.

Since both Tolkien and Lewis were full blooded Christians in the sense that Russell meant, his critique (and de Camp's) are not appropriate for Lewis and Tolkien. Since I am not a Christian, I will not—cannot—defend Christianity against criticism. But I respect Lewis and Tolkien and their work; I cannot let de Camp's shabby treatment of them pass without comment. Lewis, at least, has written much about Christian doctrine, and it is on that that I base the following:

What de Camp thinks is theology and doctrine is really heresy; when they are not precisely heretical, his terms are defined according to common meanings and not specifically the definitions given to them in doctrine.

Man can "earn his salvation", is not found in any doctrine; it is not even implied, since it would deny any purpose or meaning for the incarnation, crucifiction, and resurrection; it negates the plan of redemption; it denies efficacy of Grace; it is directly contradictory to scripture. In doctrine, immortality does not mean, nor does it imply, perpetuity, but eternity. How, or what, "God knows" is not within space or time, nor by, or in,



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

experience; God does not "know in advance", nor does he remember. De Camp has forgotten what a transcendant God transcends. If a Christian believes such, he is guilty of heresy denying God's transcendance; such beliefs may be deduced from the Patripassian Heresy.

The arguments by which de Camp demolishes what he assumes is doctrine, contain the same objections a theologian would have against them (although they have argued much better).

That people become Christians because it is the "biggest and shiniest" concept, does not bear up to examination. This "argument" is based on the rationalist's deep belief that anyone who disagrees with what he 'knows' is both stupid and foolish. To believe that is—to put it as mildly as I can—a failure in style, and 'irrational'.

I suppose that the Christian God who creates matter out of nothing, is, in some sense, bigger and shinier than a Neo-Platonic God who is only co-existant with (unformed) matter. It is an important point in theology and doctrine. But we can scarcely imagine the difference between them, any more than we can imagine the difference between ten million and a hundred million miles; we can conceive it, but we are insensible to it. That which produces conviction—the imaginative power of Christianity—is the personal and intimate relationship between God and human beings. The Greek concept of God was magnificent, but the pantheon reveals the poverty of their imagination. Neither the Neo-Platonists, nor the Gnostics improved on this.

Neo-Platonist doctrine states that, since God cannot participate in creation or be of material substance, then neither the incarnation, crucifiction, nor the resurrection actually could occur; that God did not create the world, but the demiurge, who is Satan, did; and in fact, the God of the scriptures is Satan; and the material world is evil. This is not actually 'doctrine', but an attempt by pagans to syncretize Christianity with Greek philosophy. It is also part and parcel of the Manichaean Heresy. ". . .to be sure, (Neo-Platonism and Gnosticism) influenced early Christianity", but only in so far as it was the intellectual framework of the era; it did not influence Christian doctrine. Most of the Church fathers had been Neo-Platonists before conversion: for example, Origen, but he was posthumously condemned for four heresies, all Neo-Platonic. Lewis' Eldil, it can be seen, was hardly a Gnostic concept. It is worth noting that rationalists are rather fond of the Manichaean Heresy; Russell wrote: ". . .the line that some of the gnostics took up—a line which I often thought was a very plausible one—that as a matter of fact this world that we know was made by the devil at a moment when God was not looking. There is a good deal to be said for that, and I am not concerned to refute it." This from a man who condemned Christians for believing the world evil.

That Christians are not "deterred by the state of the world", but are seemingly impelled by it, should rationally incline de Camp to re-evaluate his understanding of both Christianity and human nature, rather than pettishly concluding that all Christians are stupid fools.

When I consider the purpose for this incredible jumble on religion, along with imputations that Lewis and Tolkien hated industrialization, science, and science fiction; that the whole context of religion is gratuitous; the inclusion of an argument for birthcontrol; the ludicrous lumping of them in a catagory with Lovecraft; and that none of this has anything to do with literary criticism, or biography, I suspect that I am being propagandized.

The point of the propaganda being, that since both Lewis and Tolkien



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

believed foolish and irrational ideas, therefore their insights and criticisms of the modern world are not to be credited; they were, in fact, stupid fools, who happened to write some good stories. Since de Camp cannot prove any such thing, he has resorted to propaganda.

What follows is a brief summary of the authors' intentions in writing their respective trilogies.

Tolkien, I believe, was experimenting with a form, that of the fairy tale of the heroic quest, as he understood it through his studies of medieval ballads, epics, and romances. He made a great effort to prevent all allegorical imputations, and any semblance of his own beliefs, opinions and personality. Searching for Nordic or Christian "influences" does violence to his intention. The only influence on his Ring is the literary form itself, the author of which, ideally should be as anonymous as the author of "the Green Knight". It is, as he said, "a tale that grew in the telling", and should be judged solely on those grounds. This is an unusual attitude for us to accept, since we are so used to identifying the theme and hero of a book with the author's opinions on this and that, and with his personality. Tolkien knew that, but he knew that the form he chose did not allow for it. So he did not do it. If there is any moral to the Ring it is, that no one is wholly evil, and their misery should move us to pity; that rather than pass judgment on them, we should attempt to reason with them, for to some degree we are responsible for their wickedness, though we are not guilty of it. This is not particularly Christian.

Lewis also denies any allegorical intentions. He does have a point to make, but that is done in his book, *The Abolition of Man*. The trilogy (and especially in the third volume) is a fictional treatment of that point. Lewis had a criticism of rationalist philosophy, which rationalists cannot seem to appreciate; there is nothing particularly Christian about it.

Lewis was convinced that rationalists despised and hated the metaphorical nature of language and thought. He was appalled at their ugly and embarrassing *literalness*, with which they used language, and by which they attempted to wrest meaning from words without reference to their analogical nature. Simply because something was 'real' or 'true' mathematically, and was therefore a scientific 'fact', by which one could manipulate and know matter, did not mean that such knowledge could be applied to human nature, which is not a fact in the scientific sense, but is inextricably bound up and expressed in language and thought. When a scientist says: I can't express my theory in mere language, but only in mathematics", Lewis might answer: "Precisely. But you are trying to establish a point-to-point relationship between words and statements, and mathematical formulations; to do this, you must denude words of their meaning. . .so, of course, as you use them, they are meaningless. Rather than strain for such literalness in syntax, you should study poetry."

The N.I.C.E. is Lewis' parody of rational philosophy. His technique is quite simple. Lewis has merely taken it at face value, with bland literalness. This is not "viscious" as de Camp thinks—at least it is not Lewis' viscousness. If Bertrand Russell could write in his essay "What I Believe" that, "(Man's) thoughts and his bodily movements follow the same laws that describe the motions of stars and atoms. . .What we call our 'thoughts' seem to depend upon the organization of tracks in the brain in the same sort of way in which journeys depend upon roads and railways. . .(the human) body is composed of electrons and protons. . .(and) their changes are not continuous. . .but proceed by jerks, which are never smaller than a



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certain minimum jerk."; then what possible objection could a rationalist have to Lewis' character, Wither, whose personality, whose very presence is so random, so. . .indeterminate?

If the rationalist protests: "But that's not what I meant", Lewis might respond, "Then why did you say you believed such nonsense? Suddenly you are concerned for meaning; that is commendable. Of course there are electrons and protons that make up the body, but they are not Man, nor even an individual man. Great artists and philosophers have compared man to the stars and to the atom—they understood what that meant, but you do not when you say it, because your words, literally, mean nothing."

Ransom's group is a parody of the medieval intellect (see Lewis' "The Discarded Image"), which comprehended the world as a metaphor. Where the N.I.C.E. is the literal understood metaphorically, Ransom's group is the metaphorical taken literally. The N.I.C.E. suffers the fate of Babel. The book ends, not with the victory of religion over science, but of language and meaning (and therefore Man), over inhuman ignorance and meaninglessness.

As I said, it is not particularly Christian. It's so only to the degree that the medieval model is. Lewis believed that moral law was inherent in human nature, i.e. psychological, and that, the gracious Christian gentleman, chivalry, the Roman vir, the Greek arete, the tao of the Y Ching, the Noble Truths of Buddhims, are expressions of it. Moral codes are what we make of moral law; our codes are good or bad (including the Church's) to the degree that they reflect the completeness of the law.

To Lewis, Christianity intensified, deepened and transfigured moral law. But that is beside the point, if you are not a Christian. In this respect, the truth of Christianity or its falseness has nothing to do with giving serious attention to Lewis' and Tolkien's insights into, and critiques of, the modern world. I think the readership of FANTASTIC should be aware of this.

DON ECSEDY
4828 Blank Rd.
Sebastopol, Ca. 95472

*Yours is one of the most fascinating letters I've ever received as editor of this magazine, Don, and I appreciate the time, effort and thought which went into it. But it seems to me you've taken de Camp's rather passing theological comments far from their context and in labelling them propaganda you've done Sprague a disservice. However, I'll stay out of this argument for the time being. Sprague?*—TW

Dear Mr. White:

In the February, 1977, FANTASTIC, Lin Carter mentions a list of "several hundred" fantasy works. I probably know many of them, but still I'd love to see that list, either in FANTASTIC or elsewhere.

ANOTHER CONSTANT READER
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Dear Teddy,

High school's senior year plods leadenly onward . . . I don't really believe they'll ask Harlan Ellison to act as commencement speaker, do I?!?

About the cover: It's hard for a postage stamp to exhibit the traits of quality art—either assuming colorful dimensions or hinting at meaning—and though a colorful postage stamp it was, the Frazetta steal was irritating.

Sprague's "The Figurine" was such an idle tale (if nothing else, good for equally cute and boring puns, but . . . ), absolutely humiliating to read. The utter dismay and confusion of Willy Newbury's companions accomplished little in making him an admirable figure, despite such intentions by the author. Excellently



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

suited for being a segment of "Night Gallery", during the decline of that tv series.

"Judas Story", with its cornball glorification of rock hysteria/mysticism, was felled by the one aspect Stableford choose to play down. Success in popular music can only be attributed to intense drudgery (as accurately depicted in Ian Hunter's *Diary of a Rock Star*). John Shirley's "What He Wanted", from the Nov. '75 AMAZING, displayed more interest in the readable themes of this type of story.

First impression I got reading "Red River Lies Drowning" was C. L. Grant had taken to heart the advice that beginning writers content themselves with knowing that there are no new ideas, simply skillful retellings of old ones, just like *West Side Story* is nothing but "Romeo and Juliet" in modern dress, etc., etc. . . . Such stories are written in defeat, and specifically coupled with Grant's inability to balance out Uncle Lew's nature as both narrator and character, produced a total sham.

"The Apprentice" had me laughing out loud in my first period class as it flirted majestically with the all-too-familiar concepts of vampirism. But, dismally indebted to Polanski's *Fearless Vampire Killers*, Bischoff's conclusion left me angered and cheated.

"Buried Silver" was a history lesson, a plot copied from 50 True an' Chillin' Ghost Stories (Yikes!), a story that refused to overcome old conventions—for instance, after the fighting's over, Hero shouts in the fine REH tradition, "Party time!" Dennis More too frequently abandons his supporting characters to their own devices; it'll take *gasp* *more* than this to establish him as a writer.

"Yes ma'am, I'd like to renew this pun . . . overdue? *How* much of a fine ??!?"

Susan Doenim's stroll through "The Stuff of Legends" resulted in a padded idea busy ignoring the potentialities of viewpoint to dote on an overhyped moral. I've read her past efforts and know she can become a credible writer; refusing to enjoy or take her work seriously can only come up with potboilers that reek as bad as this one.

William Nabors' "Miasmas—A Life Term" was defiantly stunning. You may know what it is—I certainly don't, but I love it!

I like stories of totally detached human experience, like Malzberg's "Re-Entry". I like them even better when they appear in *Psychology Today*, which I don't buy. Seriously folks, just my crude mind lashing out—that's all. With a few names and some more space, this could have gone places. As is, it went a few pages.

"In Brightest Day, In Darkest Night" nudged me, and even moved me a little, but Utley had never prepared for the story to do more than that. I think I appreciate his not stretching it past its limits.

The Carter interview was a pleasant and concise progress report. My thanks, for this is the man who influenced *me* in my attitudes; a book of herbal medicines?! . . . Sure, I guess, whatever you say . . .

It was interesting to see *Fantasy Books* go for the throats of several nod-offs, but *dammit* this isn't a golden oldies section! I want to read the review of a book in the year that it appeared, not two or three years later! Sorry, Fritz.

By now it should be obvious to somebody that I've been taking my Creative Writing class far too seriously. I keep thinking of stf as a destructive free-for-all instead of a common meeting ground and honestly want to avoid contributing to the alienation and dumping groundless attacks on top of postal and SFWA complications. Good luck in your continual struggle, may you never lose its joys.

BOB ALLEN
1620 Fremont St.
Laredo, Texas 78040



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

**Profit From Pleasure...**
# WRITING!

Perhaps you can write... blessed with a flair for words, an instinct for the dramatic and a fine story sense. Maybe you do have the potential to make people laugh, cry, love, hate, yearn, sympathize and THINK. But you'll never harness your natural powers until you prove you have them. Find out if you have potential as a writer.

## FREE APTITUDE TEST!

Take the test by mail without obligation. Let the Writers Institute editors analyze your basic talents. There is no obligation.

The word-hungry world of communications (literature, broadcasting, theatre, newspapers, etc.) offers qualified writers ample income opportunities. More than 19,000 periodicals are published regularly in the U.S. alone. Fewer than 15% of their authors are 'big-name' writers. So you have every reason to give yourself a fair chance. Send for our FREE TEST, then decide about your future as a writer. Write to:

**WRITERS INSTITUTE**
*division of*
*Newspaper Institute of America*
100 Mamaroneck Ave. Dept. 93-06-7
Mamaroneck, New York 10543

Licensed by the New York State Education Dept.
● Accredited Member of
National Home Study Council

each word weighed a ton, "that part is over. Let's never, never even think about it. Because people—oh, God, my head—because people like Alice . . . and other people . . . well, they're just not very broadminded."

**A $3.00 VALUE...**
**Yours FREE**
**30 DAY SUPPLY of**
**JENASOL "Miracle Bullets"**

FORMULA CONSISTS OF:
31 VITAMINS • MINERALS BIOFLAVINOIDS • LIPOTROPIC AND NUTRITIONAL HEALTH BUILDERS Including Pure Natural ROYAL JELLY, GINSENG and VITAMIN E.
All in One High Potency JENASOL RJ FORMULA "50" TABLET.

We make this FREE offer to introduce you to the JENASOL HEALTH PROGRAM.
LIFE MAY BEGIN AFTER 40. YOU OWE IT TO YOURSELF to try this AMAZING ROYAL JELLY, GINSENG and VITAMIN E JENASOL FORMULA, on this once-in-a-lifetime NO-RISK offer . . . Just send 25¢ to cover postage and handling to receive your FREE 30-DAY SUPPLY and the JENASOL HEALTH PROGRAM. Please state if you are ordering for a man or woman.
**JENASOL, DEPT. B-855-M**
276 Park Ave. South, New York, New York 10010

**Poems Needed**
FOR SONGS & RECORDS
PUBLISHING CONTRACT guaranteed on selected material. Send your best poems or songs for FREE evaluation to HOLLYWOOD SONGWRITERS SERVICE, Dept. U-33 6253 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 1117, Hollywood, Calif. 90028 (Corner Hollywood & Vine)
MONTHLY AWARDS!

(cont. from page 124)

"It's done and done." She drew him up gently. "And nothing left of it but ourselves. Our house stands tall and gallant, Finnigan. Welcome home."

Isolde led him inside and stretched him out with great care on the sofa, his head sandwiched between an icebag and the pillow. She knelt beside him and drew soft chords from the harp.

Marty stirred. "Lovely," he murmured, and then he was asleep. Isolde played softly. Now and then, when he moved, she would replace the icebag gently, as if it were a crown.

—PARKE GODWIN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

**RATES AND TERMS:** Classified ads of the **SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE GROUP** (2 books), **AMAZING** and **FANTASTIC**, afford readers and advertisers alike an opportunity to buy, sell and trade in the **WORLD'S LARGEST SCIENCE FICTION** Market Place at reduced rates. Only 60 cents a word (including name and address). Minimum order $6.00 (10 words). Payment must accompany copy except when ads are placed by Accredited Agency. Frequency discount 5% for 6 months, 10% for 12 months paid in advance. All copy subject to publisher's approval. Closing Date: 1st of the 5th preceding month (for example, Sept. issue closes April 1st). Send order and remittance to **PRINT ADVERTISING REP. INC.**, 355 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017

## BOOKS AND MAGAZINES

BOOK READERS! Send titles wanted to: S&S Books, 80 North Wilder, A-21, St. Paul, MN. 55104.

NAME the book—we'll find it for you! Out of print book specialists. All subjects. (Title alone is sufficient.) Write—no obligations. Books-On-File, Dept. AMF, Union City, N.J. 07087.

Used, collectors paperbacks. 1,000 titles. SASE to: Farley, 409 Park Hill Drive, Milpitas, Ca. 95035.

SF & F Books, From 15¢, Discount Catalog: LASKY, Box 1216, Corona-Elmhurst, N.Y. 11373.

TREK, the leading magazine for STAR Trek and SF fans. A professional publication. Sample $2.50. TREK, 2500 Pennington, Houston, Tex. 77093.

COMPLETE illustrated catalog of all "IN Print" SF and Fantasy paperbacks and hardcover books. Over 1500 titles. No obligations. We buy "lots" collections and libraries of SF books and magazines. Send offers. Purple Unicorn Books, 4532-A10 London Road, Duluth, Minn. 55804.

EVERMIST, illustrated fantasy quarterly, subscription $2.00, published regularly since 1974, Box 27, LaBelle, Florida 33935.

NIGHTGAUNT—a new fantasy fiction magazine, lavishly printed with superb artwork. The best in modern fantasy. Order the first issue from: Bruce G. Hallenbeck, Box 138, Valatie, New York 12184 at $2.50 per copy.

LETS SWAP Si-Fi PAPERBACKS. 8 for 8 plus $2.00 postage and handling or 8 for 4 postage paid. E. Swedenberg, Box 29, Mooresville, N.C. 28115.

EMPIRE, the magazine for aspiring sf writers. Fiction and articles on writing sf by Wolfe, Macfarlane, Schweitzer, Bischoff, many more. Offset. 75¢/issue, $3/year. Checks to: Ron Rogers, Box 774, Christiansburg, VA 34073.

Paperbacks out of print. Send Wants. J. McCrae, 8120 Buttonwood, Citrus Heights, CA 95610.

## GAMES

EXTRAORDINARY VALUE: CHESS SETS. TYPE USED IN MAJOR INTERNATIONAL TOURNAMENTS. 4-3/4" KING. EBONY AND MAHOGANY. BOXED, FELTED. CHESS IMPORTS, P.O. BOX 50223, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004.

## MONEY-MAKING OPPORTUNITIES

1001 WAYS TO MAKE MONEY! 3 Free Reports reveal sure-fire ways to turn spare or full time into big money. Send no money—just name, address, zip. NEWTON, BX 339-AF6, Interlaken, N.Y. 14847.

## PERSONALS

JAPANESE Girls Make Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings. Many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, descriptions, etc. Japan International, Box 156-SF, Carnelian Bay, California 95711.

SOOTHING VIBRATOR! Plain wrapper. $3.95. NEWTON, BOX 339-D, Interlaken, N.Y. 14847.

BEAUTIFUL MEXICAN GIRLS Needing American Boy-Friends. Details, Photos FREE. World, Box 3876-SFA, San Diego, Ca. 92103.

DATES GALORE! Meet singles—anywhere. Call DATELINE, toll-free (800) 451-3245.

1000 LADIES Photos matrimonial catalog—$3.00. Intercontact, Box 737, Lauderdale, Fla. 33302.

## MISCELLANEOUS

FABULOUS FLYING STARS for Japanese martial arts target practice $3 (4 or more 20% off. NUNCHAKU book, fully illustrated $1. Free catalog. SHURIKEN, 564 Atlantic St., Stamford, Conn. 06902.

Buy at wholesale prices. Hundreds of gifts, novelties, toys. Catalog $2.00 J. McCrae, 8120 Buttonwood, Citrus Heights, Ca. 95610.

SCIENCE FICTION RADIO DRAMA CASETTES. FREE CATALOG, DETAILS. S-F PRODUCTS, 5818 BYRON, CHICAGO, ILL. 60634.

CUSTOM, PERSONALIZED Bumper Stickers! Small or Large Quantities! Low Prices! NEWTON, Box 339-SFA, Interlaken, N.Y. 14847.

STAR TREK SHIRTS AND INSIGNIA! For Info Write: STAR-FLEET UNIFORMS, Box 8, Willow Grove, Pa. 19090.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# BEST BY MAIL

**For rates, write National Classified, Box 5, Sarasota, Fla. 33578**

## MERCHANDISE FOR SALE

**LIKE unique jewelry?** Send $3.00 for sample Sterling mouse pendant and information. Olivest Jewelry, 2912D SW 38 Ct., Miami, Fl. 33134

**FENDER Freak-Out!** 30% off Fender guitars and amps! Call (817) 926-8213 or write: Warehouse BM-1, 3033 Townsend, Ft. Worth, Tx. 76110

**BLAMO! Rubberband Gun.** Blasts moving or stationary targets. Only $1.00 to: Roman Harris Company, P.O. Box 29595-C, Dallas, Tx. 75229

**TRIP-OUT. Exciting, all new, "GRASS OIL".** 1½ dr. with directions $3.00. Club Desire, 256 So. Robertson St., Beverly Hills, Ca. 90211

**HANDICAPPED employees,** disabled myself. Save money. 60 bargains. Help expenses, catalog 50¢. "Jordon World Trade", 2026 9 Ave. South, Birmingham, Al. 35205

**MAILORDER beginners** opportunities manual $3.95. Grahamco, Box 99371, Tacoma, Wa. 98499

## INSTRUCTIONS

**PLAY Guitar the Easy Way!** Without music! No notes to count! Beautifully designed book shows you how. Only $3.99. Snider's Guitar, Box 315, Dept. H, Sault, Mi. 49783

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

**BUMPER Sticker** Printing Device. Cheap, simple, portable. Free details. Bumper, POB 22791 (VY), Tampa, Fl. 33622

**LYRICS—Poems** wanted for musical setting, recordings. Promotion available on selected songs. Fabulous $1,000.00 offer. Monthly awards. Talent, 17 (JJ) Longwood, Quincy, Ma. 02169

**$1,000.00 MONTHLY** possible stuffing envelopes. National, Box 4314, Baltimore, Md. 21223

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

**IMMEDIATE earnings** stuffing envelopes. Beginner's Kit, $1.00. Lewcards, Brea, Ca. 92621

**STUFF envelopes** $550/thousand. Start immediately. Send 25c & stamped-addressed envelope. Benterprises, Box 1368-MJ, Decatur, Ga. 30031

**$3,000 FOR Poems.** Details $1.00. Box 435, Wassaic, N.Y. 12592

**FANTASTIC money maker! Stamp brings details.** Datacraft, 707 Hingham, Schaumburg, Ill. 60172

**HOW TO Get Rich** with ordinary photographs. Travel. Free gift. $2.00 - Guaranteed! World Enterprises-AC, 337 Norbourne, Lou., Ky. 40207

**WEALTH without** effort can be yours. Free facts. Slowcoach, 21 Barnes Rd., Skegness, England

**CASH With Your Camera!** Earn $5,000-$15,000 yearly selling to 4,000 clients. Sell photos 15 or more times. Guaranteed. Details 25¢. Pictureprofits, Dept. TJ2, Middle Island, N.Y. 11953

**FREE money!!** Guaranteed authentic! No obligations! Hurry - limited! Send self-addressed, stamped, No. 10 envelope to: Instawealth, POB 8142, Van Nuys, Ca. 91409

**$560 WEEKLY** possible, selling profitable dealer programs by mail. Details $2.00 (refundable). Maples, Box 520-ZH, Broken Arrow, Oklahoma 74012

**$500.00 WEEKLY! Easy,** immediate home income stuffing envelopes. Free supplies! Send 25¢, stamp. Profits, B725-TGJ2, Belen, N.M. 87002

## ASTROLOGY & OCCULT

**UFOs-Ancient Astronauts?** $1.00. Mysteryology Magazine, Box 6221-BS, Burbank, Ca. 91510

## PERSONAL—MISCELLANEOUS

**WARTS. Vergo® Cream** is gentle, painless, safe, easy. Hospital tested. Recommended by doctors. Use on all parts of body. Unconditionally guaranteed. Buy Vergo® at better pharmacies.

**POSTERS giant** catalog $1 refundable with order. AA Poster, Box 39, Seattle, Wa. 98125

**TWO MINUTE pregnancy** test. Uses urine. $2.95. Homedic, Box 25, Newton, Ma. 02195

**PLAY Poker** and Win!! Expert reveals secrets. Learn how to become a constant winner. Send $1.50. Panda Enterprises, 36 Sweet Grass Lane, Holliston, Ma. 01746

**ANTI Demon League** invitation. Details $2.00. Box 354, Colon, Mi. 49040

**LONELY? Penpals,** friends, dates, Jackpot Introductions, Box 415, Kcmo 64131. (816) 842-0722

**BIRTH certificates,** marriage certificates, high school diplomas. Samples 25¢. Boulevard Publishing, 3114 E. 83rd St., Chicago, Ill. 60617

**STOP smoking in 3 months without cutting down.** Simple - really works. Send $3.00 and SASE to: Zaion, 420 W. 24, N.Y.C., N.Y. 10011

**ALONE? Respectable adults!** Confidential introductions! Romance, marriage. Details: Cosa Agency, PO Box 1916, Wichita, Ks. 67201

**LEARN to meet** people. Details. ACICO, TG1, POB 80753, Lincoln, Ne. 68501

**FREE Magazine.** Write: Treasure Hunters, Box 53, Mesquite, Tx. 75149

## STAMPS

**500 DIFF. Stamps.** $1.00 with approvals. Indy Stamp Service, Box 26521, Indianapolis, In. 46226

## MAGIC/NOVELTIES

**MAGIC & Fun** Giant Catalog 25¢. Magic, Box 1936-DP, NYC 10017

**AMAZE, mystify. Giant catalog of magic, gags,** jokers novelties. 25¢. KKK Magic Shop, 315 West Court, Kankakee, Ill. 60901

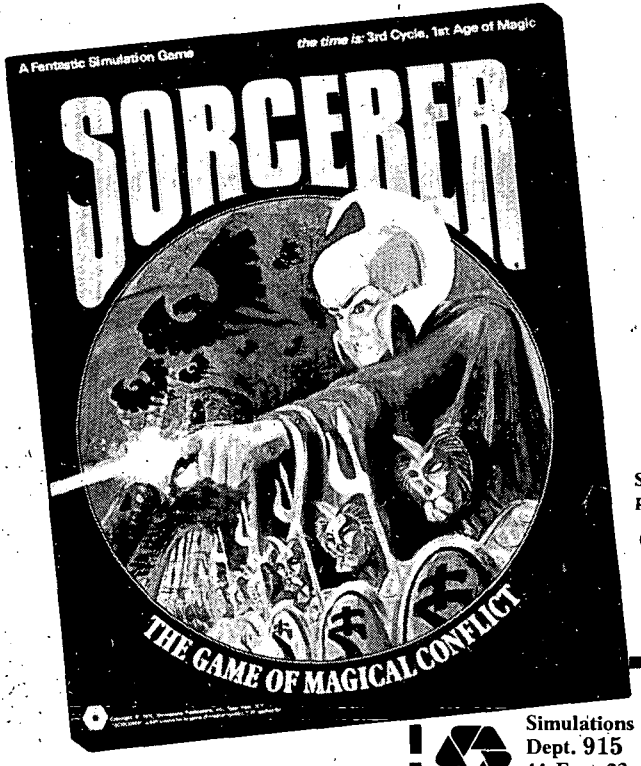
**GOOD LUCK NECKLACE.** Wear the legendary Hand and Horn "Malocchio" Necklace, treasured for centuries by Italians to ward off evil eyes and bring good luck. Beautiful gold finish. Reg. $3., Special Mail Order Offer $1. plus 25¢ postage. Wonderful gifts. Dolphin House, 1501 Dolphin St., Sarasota, Fla. 33577

**CLASSIFIEDS PAY!** Free rate folio. National Classified, Box 5, Sarasota, Fla. 33578

## 50 SEASHELLS $1.25
## TREASURES FROM THE SEA

**50 SEASHELLS $1.25 ppd.** Fabulous collection of jewels from the sea including miniature cones, Florida augers, buttons, trivia, doves, marginellas, pointed Venus, coquinas, etc. Hand picked. Dolphin House, 1501 Dolphin, Sarasota, Fla. 33577

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED




**400 Playing Pieces!**
**Big 22 x 34 full-color game map!**
**16 page rule book!**
**11 x 14 compartmented plastic box!**

Sample playing pieces (actual size)

## Fantastic fiction comes alive in SORCERER!

Demonic infantry, trolls, air dragons, human infantry, vortexes, enchanted fortresses and sorcerers. All this and more in the first professionally produced fantasy simulation game. Played on a dazzling four-color map with rules including provision for teleportation, magic bolts, conjuring of magical forces, invisibility, cloning, six colors of magic, solitaire, two-player and three-player games. One of the most unusual and challenging war games from Simulations Publications, Inc., the publishers of **Strategy & Tactics Magazine.**

Send now to:

**Simulations Publications, Inc.**
**Dept. 915**
**44 East 23rd Street,**
**New York, N.Y. 10010**

Please send me the following Simulations Series Games:

- ☐ **SORCERER, Magical Conflict:** $9
- ☐ **StarForce**, Interstellar Conflict: $8
- ☐ **Invasion America**, The U.S. Besieged: $12
- ☐ **World War Three:** $8

Please enter my subscription to **Strategy & Tactics Magazine**, the bi-monthly military history magazine with a simulation in it.

☐ **1 yr** (6 issues) $14 ☐ **2 yrs** (12 issues) $26
☐ **3 yrs** (18 issues) $36

**name** _____

**street** _____ **apt#** _____

**city** _____ **state** _____ **zip** _____

Space below for office use only.
C. Code Total Credit Post. Tax

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED